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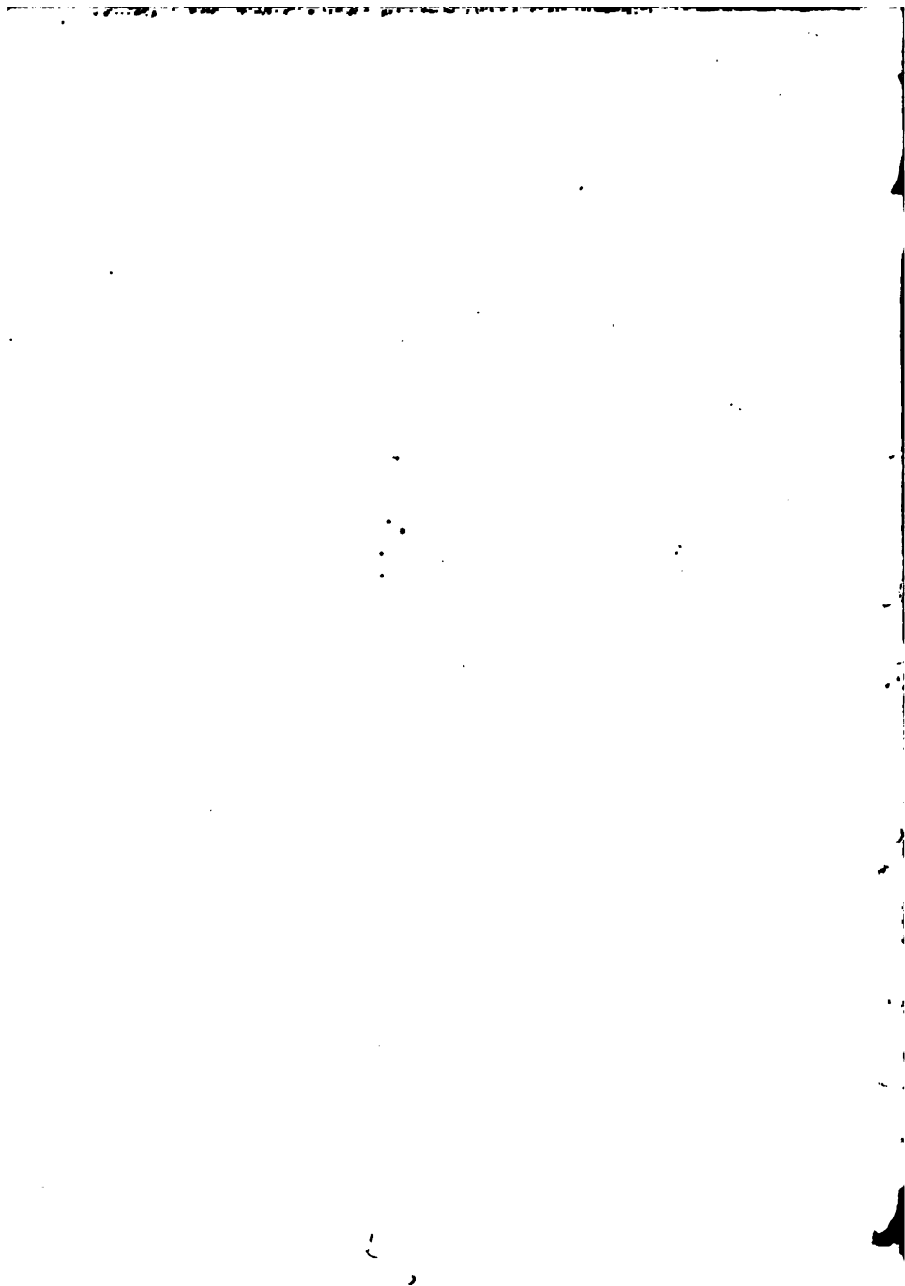
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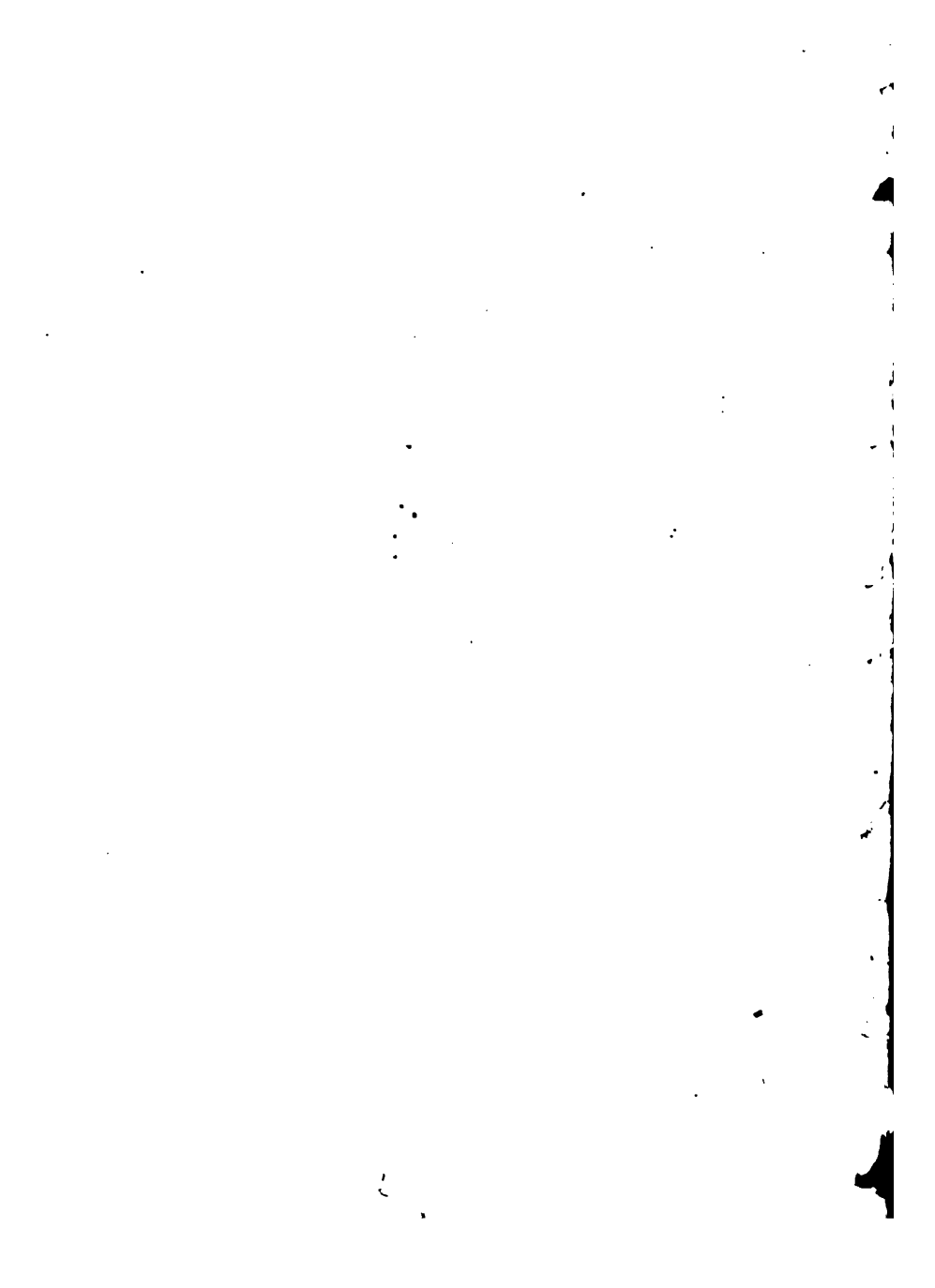
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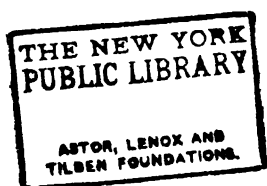
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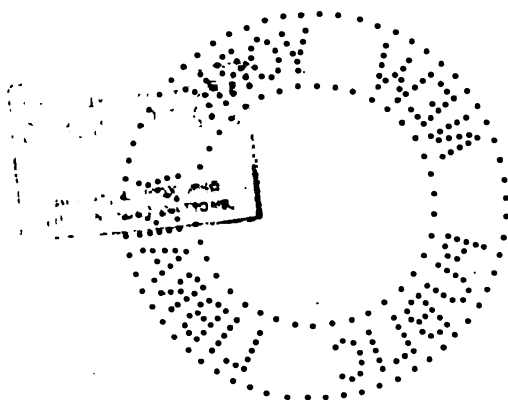


"A little figure lying stiff and cold, half buried in the snow."

 *The Green
Joby Jug
&c.*



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THE
GREEN TOBY JUG

AND

THE PRINCESS WHO LIVED OPPOSITE

Stories for Little Children

BY

MRS. EDWIN HOHLER



THOMAS NELSON AND SONS

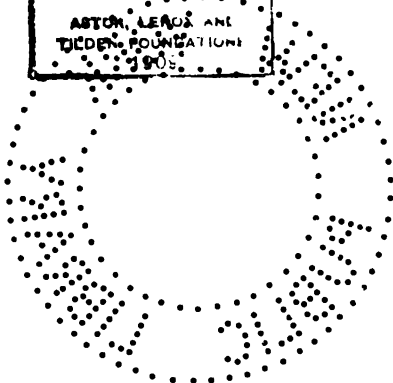
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To the dear Memory
OF
MY FATHER,
COL. SIR CRAVEN C. GORING, BART.,
THE LOVING COMPANION
OF
A VERY HAPPY CHILDHOOD.

" I remember, I remember
The house where I was born—
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn.
He never came a wink too soon,
Nor brought too long a day."

T. HOOD.

" We stroke thy broad brown paws again,
We bid thee to thy vacant chair,
We greet thee by the window pane,
We hear thy scuffle on the stair.

We see the flaps of thy large ears
Quick raised to ask which way we go."

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

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THE GREEN TOBY JUG



CHAPTER I

BOB.

HERE was a stir of expectation all over the house. A little girl, with scarlet cheeks and sparkling eyes, was dancing wildly from one room to another,

and sparkling wildly from far too excited to keep still for a moment. And no wonder; for Molly was an only child, and that evening Bob, her "very special" cousin, as she called him, was coming all the way from France to stay with her—not for a short little visit, but for two whole months.

Everything was ready for the expected guest.

In the nursery a bright fire was burning. The tea was laid, with a big, almost birthday-looking cake, strawberry jam, and a whole array of tiny egg-cups, which were waiting to be filled with nice little brown bantams' eggs. On the top of the dolls' house was a long row of Molly's babies, making an attractive show in their best clothes.

Then, in the room prepared for Bob, Molly had put a large bunch of heather, and arranged a whole row of birds' eggs and bright-coloured snails' shells along the mantelpiece. As she inspected it all with a look of satisfaction, she heard nurse calling,—

"Come, Miss Molly, let me brush your hair. It is nearly time for you to go down to be ready to meet Master Bob."

Molly went at once. As her eyes fell on the blue ribbon with which nurse was tying her hair, she cried,—

"O Nannie! I've forgotten to dress Jack. Do put his bow on at once."

Jack was Molly's dog. He was of the kind called "dachshund," and had a long black body and short, very crooked, tan legs.

Jack had been following his little mistress's flying footsteps up and down all the afternoon; and now he lay, in an exhausted condition, watching the proceedings with an expression which seemed to say,—

“Now I shall have a little rest; when nurse holds on to a handful of curls like that, she will not let you go in a hurry.”

Nurse turned to Jack, and lifting him on to a chair, tied a grand blue bow on his collar, which exactly matched that of his mistress.

“Now you are both ready,” she said; “run down and be ready to welcome Master Bob.”

The house where Molly lived was long and low, and built of dark grey stone. From the front it appeared dull and almost ugly-looking; but once inside the quaint old door you came into a brightly-lighted conservatory, gay with flowers and paved with many-coloured tiles.

The change from the darkness outside to the light and warmth within was dazzling at first to Bob on his arrival, and he stood for a moment in the doorway blinking at the light, till a little figure came flying towards him. Flinging her arms round her little cousin,

Molly hugged and kissed him while dragging him through the big door into the old-fashioned inner hall.

There her mother was waiting.

"My dear boy, how tired you must be!" she cried, as she stooped to kiss him.

"I am rather tired, auntie," Bob answered; "and the steamer was horrid—it made me so ill."

"O Bob!" cried Molly, "I just love the sea part."

Bob got rather red, and turned to his aunt.

"Molly doesn't understand," he said; "it wasn't the sea that made me ill, but the nasty, oily smell on board."

Auntie smiled as she stroked his head.

"I know, dear; Molly has only been over in summer, when she could stay on deck all the time. And now I am sure you are hungry, so you must go up to the nursery at once and have tea."

In a very short time the children were seated at tea in the cosy nursery, with nurse at the head of the table, and Jack on a chair of his own seated gravely between them.

"How nice to have Nannie for tea!" Bob said; pausing with a piece of cake half-way to his mouth; "what have you done with Miss Page?"

Miss Page was Molly's governess, but she only came for the day.

"Well, you see," answered Molly proudly, "I thought we should be so much happier alone with Nannie on your first evening, that I asked mother to let us have it like a half-holiday. Miss Page never stays for tea then. Wasn't it a good idea?"

"Lovely!" said Bob feelingly; "and I am specially glad, because I have brought you and Nannie such beautiful presents, and it might have hurt poor Miss Page's feelings when she saw I had nothing for her. And, O Nannie! we've quite finished tea, so do come and unpack my things and get the presents out, like a darling."

Bob was such a pretty little boy, with close-cropped dark hair, big, soft, grey eyes, and round, red cheeks, like nothing so much as very ripe apples, that, when he took to coaxing, he generally got his own way.

"Very well, Master Bob," said Nannie, with a smile; "if you have both quite finished, I can unpack now. Come and show me where they are."

Very soon Nannie was on her knees before the trunk.

"What a very queer smell there is in here!" she exclaimed, as she lifted the lid. "Why, it's something in this!" she added, as she drew out a small parcel, squashed quite out of shape by being wedged in tightly beside a pair of thick boots.

"Oh, I do hope it isn't spoilt!" cried Bob; "it is my present for you, Nannie—a cream-cheese, because I know you like them. Oh, dear! I'm afraid I packed it very badly. I put it in myself just at the last, as I thought nurse might refuse to let me bring it if she saw it."

"Never mind," said Nannie, consolingly, "it's only a little out of shape. And thank you so much, dear. I'm sure I shall enjoy it ever so much;" though, perhaps, privately she may have thought it might taste rather strongly of boot polish.

But Bob was quite comforted, and began dragging out a bulky paper parcel.

"This is for you, Molly," he said. "I have been keeping it for ages—ever since we went to the sea-side last June; it's exactly like what the fishermen there wear strapped round them."

Molly undid the parcel with eager fingers, and there was a small, white fishing-basket, with a bright red cord by which to hang it round her shoulders, and "Le Havre" worked across it in red letters.

"How lovely!" cried Molly; "but what does 'Le Havre' mean?"

"That is the name of the place it came from," said Bob; "and inside there are some biscuits for Jack."

At the mention of his name, Jack, who had been watching the proceedings with great interest, trotted up, wagging his tail violently, and when he caught sight of the biscuits he sat up and begged.

"Greedy dog!" said Molly, as she gave him one. "Won't it be lovely for taking our luncheon in when we go for a picnic?" she

continued, as she hugged her basket. "Oh, we must have a picnic quite soon—on Saturday, perhaps. Let us ask mother if we may."

"What is it you are going to ask me?" said mother's voice at that moment. "Come to the nursery fire, children, and tell me what you are talking about. Why, Molly," she went on, as she caught sight of the basket which the little girl was holding in her arms, "has Bob brought you that? What a delightful present!"

"Yes, mother," began Molly promptly; "and it's that we're talking about. You see, we want to take it for a picnic right away on the moors somewhere. Do let us go on Saturday, if it is fine—'Le Havre' would hold our luncheon so beautifully."

Mother smiled at the little girl's eagerness.

"We must ask Miss Page first," she said; "but I am sure she will not object. And certainly you ought to take Bob for one day on your beloved moors before the winter sets in."

"Winter, auntie!" exclaimed Bob, with a

puzzled face. "Why, it is not time for winter for months yet!"

"Not in most places, dear," his aunt answered; "but up among these hills there is no knowing how soon it may begin."

"Well, then, it's quite settled," broke in Molly impatiently, "we shall have our picnic on Saturday. O Bob! just think if we got lost on the moors what fun it would be. We might have to sleep out all night, and we could pretend you were a brave knight rescuing me from the enemy. I do long 'to sleep under the stars,' as they say in books."

"Molly," said her mother quickly, "do not suppose any such horrid things; it frightens me even to hear you talk of being out alone at night on those dreadful, lonely moors."

"Not alone, mother," answered Molly reassuringly; "I should have Bob with me, and I know he would take great care of me."

Mother shook her head.

"No, Molly; even with Bob to take care of you I should be terrified. Do not put such dreadful ideas into my head, or I shall be miserable whenever you are out for long."

Bob jumped up and gave his aunt a vigorous hug.

"Don't look so unhappy, darling auntie," he said; "I'll promise to take the greatest care of Molly, and not let her try to get lost."

Molly hastened to change the subject.

"Won't it be nice?" she said. "Bob will be here for your winter birthday, and he can help me to choose what we shall do for a treat."

"But auntie's birthday is in the spring," put in Bob, turning to her; "I wrote to you for it, didn't I?"

"Yes, dear," she replied; "but, you see, our wedding day is in November, and Molly calls that my 'winter birthday,' and she always insists on choosing what we are to have for a treat, just as if it were her own birthday," she added, laughing.

Molly got rather red.

"That's too bad of you, mother. You know that if I didn't choose for you, you could never decide.—Oh, here is father coming!" she cried, rushing to meet him, as the sound

of footsteps was heard coming towards the nursery, and a moment later Molly's father came into the room.

"Father," she cried, "I am telling Bob about your winter birthday, and mother is saying such horrid things."

Father laughed.

"Well, I have come to take her away to dress for dinner; and it is high time for tired little children to be in bed—so good-night to you both."

Mother got up to go.

"I shall come back and give you both a good-night kiss when you are ready for bed," she said, as she left the room, "so make haste, and do not stop here chattering."

Molly led the way to Bob's room, talking all the time.

"You must try to think very, very hard, Bob," she said, "and help me to decide on a new sort of present for their birthday; half the fun of it is in beginning to plan weeks beforehand."

"All right, I'll think about it," answered Bob, rather drowsily. He was really very

tired, and he knew that when Molly started talking she did not soon leave off.

"Well, good-night," said Molly, as she left the room reluctantly; but as she reached the door she turned back. "O Bob! I must just tell you about Romeo," she cried. "I am sure he knew you were coming, for he sat on your window-sill this morning and crowed so loudly."

"Who's Romeo?" inquired Bob, with rather languid interest, as he took a last peep from his window.

"Why, you can't have forgotten!" and Molly's voice sounded as if she felt very much aggrieved; "I have told you such heaps about him. He's my very prettiest bantam-cock, and Ju—"

She was interrupted by a yell from Bob, who was holding back the curtain and gazing at it with a face of amazement.

Molly was at his side in an instant.

"Why, it is one of Juliet's eggs!" she cried. "Nannie, come and see! The bantams have laid a lovely brown egg in one of Bob's window curtains as a welcome to him."

Nannie came running to look; then she burst out laughing.

"Well, Miss Molly," she said, "of all the strange animals I ever met, those bantams of yours are the queerest. Master Bob shall have the egg for his breakfast. But now you must not stay talking for another moment."

So, with a last good-night, Molly allowed herself to be led off to bed; and when mother came up some time later, she found her little girl fast asleep, still clasping the red cord of the new basket.





CHAPTER II

IN SEARCH OF A TOBY JUG.

THE next morning—
lessons over—
Bob's first idea was
to visit the farm, and
the two children were soon racing
over the fields towards the group of
quaint, old, grey buildings nestling under the
shelter of a friendly hill.

Half-way there they met the gardener, and
Bob stopped to speak to him.

"It's very nice to have you here again,
Master Bob, and I hope you are going to
see the missus; she expects you will be round
soon," was the gardener's greeting.

"We were just on our way to Mrs.
Green's," answered Bob politely; "and I
want to see the baby too."

Green laughed.

"You ask her to show you my new Toby," he said; "you'll like that best, I reckon."

"Your 'Toby!' Mr. Green," cried Molly. "What's that?"

"You go and see, Miss Molly," answered Green, as he turned up the path to the house.

"Let's go there first," suggested Bob; "I want to know what he means."

The gardener's cottage stood close to the farmyard, and in a few minutes the two children were knocking loudly at the door. It was opened by Mrs. Green, baby in arms.

"Good-morning," began Molly. "Oh, do let me hold baby while you talk to Bob!" and she held out her arms.

The baby laughed and crowed, making frantic efforts to get to her; but his mother hesitated.

"He's such a heavy boy for you to hold, missy," she said.

But as she spoke, baby settled the matter by setting up such a loud howl, while he stretched out his arms to Molly, that his mother reluctantly placed him in her charge.

Then his new nurse promptly sat down on the nearest chair, hugging her precious burden tightly, and talking to him, while Bob conversed with Mrs. Green.

Suddenly Molly remembered.

"Do show us the new 'Toby,'" she cried, jumping up with small regard for the baby's comfort. Then, as Mrs. Green lifted something from the mantelpiece, she held out the baby.

"Oh, how funny! Take baby, quick, and let me hold that," she cried; and she placed the now shrieking boy on his back in the middle of the table, from whence he was quickly rescued by his anxious mother.

The two children bent over the "Toby" with deep interest. It was a quaint pottery figure of a man with short legs crossed, and a hand on each knee. He had bright-coloured clothes, and his head was crowned with a huge hat.

"What is he meant for?" questioned Molly, "and where did you get him?"

"These figures used to be made for beer-mugs, missy. You see the crown of his hat

comes off, and he is hollow inside," answered Mrs. Green. "Green bought him in Lee market when he was over there last Saturday."

"Lee—just over the hill!" cried Molly excitedly. "How far is it, and is there a market every Saturday?"

"Yes, missy, I believe so; but it's six miles away, and such a bad road, Green says."

"Well, now, we must be off," said Molly. "Good-bye, Mrs. Green; we have enjoyed looking at the 'Toby,' that's—"

But here she was interrupted by a pinch from Bob.

"And dear baby too. It is so nice to see him," he broke in.

As soon as they were out of the cottage Molly turned to Bob.

"You are much cleverer than I am at remembering to be polite," she said admiringly. "I was just going to say we had only come to see the 'Toby.' But, O Bob! we must get one for father; and if Saturday is market day we must get to Lee when we

have our picnic. We could easily walk that distance."

"Yes," answered Bob, "if only Nannie were with us; but Miss Page never would. Let's ask if we need have her."

But when mother was consulted on the subject she was firm. Miss Page wanted to make a sketch, and they must go with her; but they could roam about by themselves while waiting.

"Bother!" muttered Molly. But her mother thought it best to take no notice.

When the children were alone together again, Molly returned to the subject.

"I do wish we could have had Nannie with us on Saturday," she said. "If we had told her how much we want to go to Lee to buy a Toby jug, I am sure she would have let us."

"But we must go somehow. Can't we persuade Miss Page to take us?" said Bob.

Molly shook her head decidedly.

"Miss Page would never get that distance," she said. "But once she begins her sketch, she will never notice us; and if we

start at once, and run very fast, I daresay we shall get to Lee and back before she misses us."

"That will be the best plan," answered Bob. "And I do hope we shall have enough money to buy a Toby jug. I have got a new silver shilling and three pennies."

"And I have two shillings all in pennies. I am sure that ought to be enough," said Molly, triumphantly.

Saturday morning dawned brilliantly fine, and it was still early when the little party came downstairs ready to start, Molly carrying her precious basket "Le Havre," now heavy with luncheon, and Bob laden with Miss Page's sketching things.

Mother came to the door to see them off.

"Be sure to be careful not to go where it is boggy," she called after them, "and remember how very soon it gets dark."

"All right, auntie," shouted Bob from the gate; "I'll take good care of Molly."

Up the road and through the village, past the church, they went. Then the valley in which the house lay ended abruptly, and all

round rose the hills, purple and brown with the fast-withering heather which clothed them.

The little party turned up an old disused road, very rough and stony, and so steep that they were obliged to pause several times for Miss Page to rest, whilst Jack raced wildly backwards and forwards, barking with delight each time they started again.

After a long climb they reached the summit of the hill, and, looking back, could see the roofs of the houses in the valley far below them, whilst all around stretched miles of moor, fading into the blue hills in the distance.

This was the spot which Miss Page had chosen for her sketch ; and as it was quite luncheon time, they seated themselves beside the mountain stream which bubbled along merrily.

"Le Havre" was unpacked, and they ate their picnic meal.

"After we have settled you, and seen you begin your sketch, you won't mind if we go on further for a walk, will you?" said Molly. "We want to go down that path," and she

pointed to a rough track through the heather.

"I don't mind being left, but don't you think you had better keep to the road?" answered Miss Page nervously. "You know your mother said to be careful of the bogs."

"But that's the path leading to Lee, so it must be quite safe; besides, I once went a little way down it with father," said Molly. And this seemed to be satisfactory to Miss Page, who nodded consent.

Off set Molly down the path, followed by Bob.

No sooner were they out of sight than she turned to him.

"Bob, we shall have to run ever so fast; it's much later than I thought we should be in starting. We can't miss our way if we keep to the path, and it seems to be all down-hill."

So they started as fast as they could run, with Jack close at their heels—on and on till their run had slackened into a jog-trot, and Bob felt breathless and hot.

"Molly," he panted at last, "I *must* stop and walk a little."

Molly slackened her pace.

"I'm tired too," she said, as they walked on together; "only I thought, if I stopped first, you would say I was only a girl," and she took Bob's hand and patted it to encourage him.

The path was now becoming less steep, and before them in the distance lay a straggling village—a desolate, bleak-looking place in the midst of miles of heather and bog. But at the sight of it the two children quickened their steps again; and although Molly had an uncomfortable idea that the sun looked as if it might set before very long, she said nothing about it; she only cheered Bob with the thought that when they had bought the precious Toby jug, they would get some buns to eat.

As they entered the village street several people lounging about stared at them curiously, and one woman standing at the door of her cottage spoke to them as they passed in a pleasant voice and with a broad north country accent. She asked if they had come far all alone.



IN THE MARKET-PLACE.

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"Yes," answered Molly, "we have come a long way; and, please, will you tell us how far the market is?"

"Keep straight on, and you'll see it on your right," the woman answered.

Then, as they thanked her and walked on, she called after them,—

"Don't you be long before you turn home—it's getting late already."

In a few minutes more they were in the market-place, with its quaint rows of covered booths and open stalls, on which were exhibited every sort of thing for sale, from mutton and beef to needles and pins. But now it was late for selling, and most of the owners of the stalls were busy packing up their unsold wares.

Suddenly Molly gave a cry of delight and clutched Bob's arm.

"Oh! just look," she cried, "did you ever see such a dear?" and she pointed to an almost empty stall, in the middle of which stood a Toby jug. It was a most quaint little figure, all dressed in wide stripes of green and white; on his head was a green cap with a long

point to it, like "Punch's;" and his face wore the funniest expression, half laughing, half imploring.

"How much does this cost, please?" inquired Bob, with his most grown-up air, of the woman behind the stall.

"That's three shillings, my little sir," she answered.

Molly gave a sigh of relief.

"We've got that," she said. "I was so afraid it was going to cost more money than we've got. There's two shillings of mine," she went on, laying a little heap of coins on the stall, "and I hope you won't mind its being such a lot of pennies. But the other shilling is all silver."

Bob now produced his precious shilling.

"Will you pack up the Toby jug for us?" he said, as he handed it to the woman. "We've a long way to go, and it might get broken."

Then, as they waited, he whispered to Molly,—

"I've still got three pennies left. I'll ask where we can get some buns, and we'll go and have some before we start."

In answer to his inquiries the woman directed them to a shop near by, and they set off, Bob hugging the precious parcel in both arms.

The confectioner's window looked most inviting, and a tempting smell of hot cakes came through the open door.

"How hungry I am!" exclaimed Molly, as she peeped in. "But, O Bob! do look at that poor little boy!"

There, just in the doorway, was a little shabby figure, with a thin, white face and eager, hungry eyes, gazing longingly at the dainties within.

Molly, who never suffered from shyness, went up to him, and touched him on the arm to attract his attention. The boy started and shrank away, raising a pair of mournful, dark eyes to her face.

"What is the matter, poor boy?" she inquired. "Are you hungry?"

But the child only retreated further into his corner, shaking his head, and murmuring some words which she could not catch.

"I do believe it is French he is speaking,"

Bob cried eagerly, "only with a funny accent!"

Then turning to the boy, he began to question him in that tongue. The poor little stranger positively beamed, and began to chatter so fast and eagerly that the children had to stop him and ask him to speak more slowly, so that they might understand.

His home was in the south of France, he told them; but, a year before, his father had died, and he had come to England with his mother, thinking they could earn more money there by playing and singing than they could make in their own home. That summer they had been to several of the fashionable watering-places in Yorkshire, and had been so successful that they had determined to make their way south on their homeward journey, when his mother, who was always delicate, had caught a severe chill. She had dragged herself as far as Lee, and now lay dying in a lodging. Their little store of money was almost exhausted, and the poor child, whose one idea was to

save it as much as possible for his mother's sake, had not tasted food himself that day.

Of course all this took a long time to tell, and the children had to encourage him with many questions before they drew the whole story from him.

When Bob understood that the little boy had really had nothing to eat that day, he came round to Molly's side, and, holding out his three pennies, he whispered to her,—

“Go into the shop, Molly, and buy three of the biggest buns you can get, and I'll wait out here. He looks so frightened that, if we both left him, he might run off.”

Molly obeyed and entered the shop, closely followed by Jack. She pointed out the buns she wanted—nice, big, brown ones, hot and fresh—and asked for three of them.

While the woman was putting them in a bag for her, Jack had been wandering along the counter, tail erect and nose in the air, sniffing the inviting odour of hot cakes. Finding that no one was going to offer any to him, he suddenly sat up and begged, and

gave a most piteous whine to attract attention.

The woman laughed and patted him.

"Your little dog seems hungry," she said; "shall I give him a biscuit?"

Molly's face grew scarlet. Really, it was most inconsiderate of Jack. He might have known that she would have given him a bun if she had had any money left.

Then a bright idea struck her.

"I think he is thirsty," she answered, "he's had a long walk; so perhaps you would not mind giving him a drink of water."

"Water can't cost anything," she murmured to herself, casting an indignant glance at Jack on her way to the door, where she handed the parcel of buns to the poor little boy.

At first he seemed scarcely able to believe that they really were for him. His little thin face flushed and his eyes sparkled with pleasure as he burst into such a rapid torrent of words and thanks that the children could hardly understand what he said. Then, clasping the paper bag firmly in his arms, he ran off, as if

afraid that if he lingered too long it might be taken from him again.

"I wish we had asked him his name," said Bob. "I am sure auntie would have sent them some things to eat. And, O Molly! we must be very quick, it's so dreadfully late."

"We'll run all the way," answered Molly. "But I must fetch Jack; he's having a drink," and she drew Bob into the shop.

There, on a chair by the counter, sat Jack, a saucer of milk beside him and a collection of small biscuits before him, which he was in the act of devouring.

"O Jack!" cried Molly, in a horrified voice. But the shopwoman only laughed.

"Don't scold him, miss," she said. "I found some stale biscuits, which I took the liberty of giving him."

"Thank you very much," said Molly. "And now we must go, so come along, Jack." And with a smiling good-bye from the woman, the two children, followed by Jack, left the shop and set off down the street.

But when they got out on to the moor again they were horrified to find how dark it had become. The last traces of the sunset had disappeared, and the hills only looked like dark, shapeless lumps against the dusky sky.

"O Bob!" cried Molly in terror, "what shall we do? Miss Page will have gone home long ago, and we'll never find our way back."

Bob's face had grown very white, but he tried to speak bravely.

"We must just run as fast as we can," he said firmly. "Hold my hand, Molly, and be sure to keep to the path."

So, hand in hand, the two children went on into the fast gathering darkness of the lonely moors.





CHAPTER III

LOST ON THE MOORS.

IT is one thing to run down a steep hill on a bright, sunny afternoon, when the distance seems even shorter than you expect, and there is no difficulty in keeping to the right path ; but when, later on, you turn to climb wearily up the rough track, and the summit, which you imagine to be so near, appears to go further away in the gathering darkness—then it is quite another thing.

So thought poor Molly and Bob as they toiled breathlessly on, trying anxiously to see the path in the dusk. For now it was

growing darker and darker, and only a gleam of twilight was left in the sky, against which the mountains stood out like weird, black sentinels of every shape and form.

Suddenly Molly hesitated, then stopped.

"Bob," she said anxiously, "the heather seems so very long here; are you quite sure we are on the path?"

"I don't think we could have left it without knowing," answered Bob encouragingly; and they went on again, though more slowly.

But in a few minutes Molly gave a scream of terror.

"O Bob! my leg's gone right into a bog and I can't move. Pull me out—quick!"

Bob flung his arms round her, and after what seemed an age of violent tugging and struggling, succeeded in drawing her back on to the firm ground. It really was very alarming for the little girl: her foot had sunk into the soft, oozy bog, which had drawn it in right up to her knee; and now she stood sobbing with terror, while Bob tried his best to comfort her.

"Don't cry, Molly darling, you are quite.

safe now; this heather's quite firm and dry, and I don't believe we can be more than a tiny bit off the path. Perhaps, if I feel very carefully, I may be able to find it again."

But Molly clutched his arm.

"You mustn't leave me!" she cried; "suppose we lost each other? Hold my hand very tight, and feel about well with your foot before you take a step."

For a few minutes the two children groped their way about in the darkness; then Bob stopped.

"It's no good," he said, in a rather shaky voice; "there must be bog all round us. What shall we do, Molly? we are lost!"

There was such a world of woe in Bob's voice that Molly felt inclined to start crying again, but a recollection of the stories she had heard about people lost on the moors suddenly occurred to her.

"Bob," she said impressively, "we must sit down and keep quite still till daylight. Father had a friend who was lost up here last year, and I remember hearing him say that if he hadn't had the presence of mind

to sit and wait for the morning, he would certainly have been killed in a bog."

So together the two sat down on a patch of soft, springy heather; not an uncomfortable seat, if only the deep, unbroken silence and darkness of the lonely hills had not been too terrifying to allow them to think of anything else.

All this time Jack had kept close to his little mistress's heels. He was far too wise not to understand that something very unusual was happening, and that in consequence it behoved him to keep an extra strict guard over her. He had stepped into the bog himself, and it was a very wet and draggled little dog, with ears and tail drooping dejectedly, which crept up to Molly as she sat down.

But although Jack was not enjoying himself, he was a dog of spirit, and when he heard sounds which told him that his mistress was crying quietly, though it was too dark to see her, he felt that it was time for him to offer the best consolation in his power. Jumping on to her knee, he put a

cold, wet nose up to her face and licked her lovingly.

Molly flung both her arms round him.

"Darling Jacky," she cried, "what a comfort you are!—you do feel such company," and she clasped him tight. Then she turned to Bob.

"I am so cold," she said, with a little shiver; "how I do wish I had had my warm frock on."

Bob jumped up, and pulling off his own coat, began to wrap it round her. It was in vain that she declared she would not have it, and struggled to take it off; he was quite determined.

"Don't talk nonsense, Molly," he said, as he buttoned it closely round her throat—"of course you must have it. Men always give their coats to ladies in story books when they are lost or shipwrecked, or things like that."

So Molly was obliged to submit, and for some time the two little cousins sat close together without speaking. Then Bob broke the silence.

"I am so very miserable about dear auntie," he said, in a choky voice, "she will be so dreadfully frightened. Just think, Molly, she'll have been watching for us for hours already. What will she do before to-morrow morning?"

But Molly, who was much warmer now, began to take a more cheerful view of everything.

"I don't suppose we'll have to stay here all the night," she answered cheerfully. "You see, Miss Page must have gone off home hours ago, to say that she had lost us; and they would be sure to set out at once to look for us."

"Perhaps," said Bob dismally; "but I'm sure it's the middle of the night already. I did so promise to take care of you too, and auntie will think I haven't even tried."

The idea that it was the middle of the night alarmed Molly, and reminded her that the hours for nursery tea, and for their supper of biscuits and milk too, were both long past, and she began to cry again.

"Oh dear!" she wailed, "I am so very

hungry. Do you think we shall be starved to death before the morning, Bob? I'm sure I have never felt so hungry before."

This terrible idea was too much even for Bob's fortitude, and the two children clung together, sobbing with loneliness and terror, while Jack licked them wildly to show his sympathy.

"If only it were not so dreadfully still! It frightens me to listen. Let's shout as loud as ever we can, and some one might hear us," suggested Bob.

So they called and cried till they were hoarse and weary, but only the echoes answered them from the silent hills; and at last, quite worn out, they sank back on their heathery seat, too miserable even to talk.

And after a time, overcome with hunger and fright, the two little heads began to nod; and when the stars came out, they looked down upon two little sleeping figures, with Jack sitting erect and watchful between them.

Molly was the first to wake. Jack had sprung suddenly off her knee and was run-

ning round them, barking loudly and joyously. She shook Bob.

"Wake up, quick!" she cried eagerly, "Jack hears some one coming. We must call out to make them come this way."

Bob sat up sleepily, and they both shouted together as loudly as they could. Then they waited in breathless silence and suspense. Yes, it really was some one. A loud hail came to them through the darkness, and in another moment or so two flickering lights became visible.

There was no need to shout now, for Jack, who had jumped back again on to Molly's knee, had evidently undertaken to make known their whereabouts. There he sat, his head thrown back, barking and howling in turn.

"What a long time they are taking!" sighed Molly impatiently; "they seem to go round and round, instead of coming straight to us."

"I expect they have to pick their way because of the bog," said Bob; and as he spoke they could distinguish two figures

coming towards them. In another moment father, closely followed by Green, sprang forward and clasped Molly in his arms.

"My poor child!" he cried, as he held the trembling little figure to him, "I thought I should never find you."

"We've been here hours and hours, and we're so cold and hungry," sobbed Molly, overcome by the thought of all her woes.

Father lifted her up and spoke decidedly.

"Now I am going to get you home as quickly as possible, so you must wait to tell me about it till afterwards. Green, will you carry Master Bob, and go on first with the lantern?" he added. Then he looked doubtfully at Jack, who was still clasped tightly in Molly's arms. "I don't think I can carry Jack as well as you—need I, dear?" he asked.

"Jack is tired too, tireder even than me; besides, he would get drowned in a bog in the dark. If you can't carry us both, I would rather get down and walk, and lead him, please," she said firmly.

Father submitted at once.

"All right, we must not lose Jack; I should never have found you if he had not barked, like a clever dog."

And, with his double burden, he strode after Green. It did not seem so very far before they came to the place where the children had left the road in the morning. There a cart was waiting—a strong farm cart, the only kind that could be trusted not to lose a wheel on that rough track. In it they were soon seated, while Green led the horse, and father walked beside him with a lantern.

"Have you got the Toby jug quite safe?" whispered Molly anxiously, as they jolted over the stones.

Bob nodded.

"I've kept my arms tight round him all the time," he said, "so I'm sure he can't be the least bit hurt."

Molly gave a sigh of satisfaction and laid her head down on his shoulder, after which she must have dozed, for the next thing she knew was that the cart had stopped and she was lifted out and placed in mother's arms

—mother, who was crying and laughing and kissing her, all at the same moment, whilst Nannie hovered round, waiting for her turn to come.

And it was mother herself who carried the weary little girl up to the nursery, pausing at the door to speak to Bob.

“Come in here, dear,” she said, “Nannie has got your slippers warming at the fire.”

But the little boy did not follow her immediately.

“I want to go and put this away first in my room,” he whispered to Nannie, holding out his precious parcel; and Nannie, who understood all about “secrets,” refrained from exhibiting any curiosity, and let him go to his room alone. There the Toby jug was soon safely hidden in his cupboard, and with a sigh of relief Bob stretched his cramped arms and followed his aunt to the nursery.

When he got there, Molly was seated on her mother’s knee. Her shoes and stockings were off, and her pink toes were stretched out to the blazing fire, whilst Nannie had taken off her muddy frock and wrapped her in her warm flannel dressing-gown.

"O auntie," Bob began, as he ran into the room, "I'm so dreadfully sorry; we never meant—"

But here auntie stopped him.

"You shall tell me all about it afterwards," she said. "First let Nannie pull off your damp boots and put on your warm dressing-gown, and you must both have some hot tea. Have you had anything to eat?" she asked.

Molly shook her head dismally.

"We've not had anything at all since luncheon," she said, "and I was most dreadfully hungry; but now I don't think I want anything, I only feel horrid and empty."

She looked so intensely pathetic over the loss of her appetite that it made her mother laugh.

"Come, dear," said mother, "drink some of this nice tea, and then perhaps you might try this dear little brown bantam's egg."

And very soon the two wanderers, their troubles all forgotten, were enjoying a hearty meal, and Jack was partaking of the dinner which Nannie had carefully kept for him.

When they had quite finished, and had

drawn their chairs to the fire for a final warm before going to bed, Molly told the story of their adventures—everything, that is to say, except what it was they wanted to get at Lee.

“Please don’t ask me that,” she said, when her mother questioned her, “it is a secret; but it was nothing naughty, I promise you, and we’ll tell Nannie all about it if you like.”

“Very well,” answered mother, “I won’t ask you. But you did know it was naughty to run away and leave poor Miss Page like that.”

“I’m so sorry,” said Bob, in a very penitent voice; “it was all my fault. I ought to have taken better care of Molly; and we didn’t think it would take half as long.”

“It was not at all his fault,” cried Molly. “I made him go; and then when I was cold he wrapped me in his coat, and took ever such care of me.”

“O Bob!” was auntie’s answer, “did you really take off your coat? I do hope you won’t have caught a very bad cold.”

“My throat feels rather sore, that’s all,” said Bob.

"Well, children," said mother, "I shall not scold you, although you deserve it, for I think the fright you have had has been punishment enough. I trust you will not both have colds. Bob, I am afraid, is going to have one of his bad throats. Oh dear, I did think you had more sense."

"We should have found our way all right if only we hadn't stopped so long to talk to the poor little French boy," protested Molly.

"Well," said mother, "as you did stay so long talking to him, you should have asked for his name and address; then we might have been able to help him."

"I do wish we had," sighed Molly; then, "Oh dear, I feel as if it must be quite to-morrow morning. I don't believe I've ever been up so late before."

Then mother sent them both off to bed, where, no sooner had their weary little heads touched their pillows, than they were fast asleep; and by the time Molly woke up next morning it was a good deal nearer to luncheon than to breakfast time.



CHAPTER IV

THE LAND OF THE SNOW QUEEN.

PAY attention to your scales, and leave the dog alone."

Molly was at her music lesson. It was Monday afternoon, and

Miss Page was decidedly rather cross. Poor thing! she had

not yet quite got over her fright at losing the two children.

"I am sure Jack wants something," said Molly; "I left him on Bob's bed to amuse him, and he isn't generally troublesome when I am at my music."

Jack certainly was behaving in a most extraordinary manner. First he ran to the piano

and barked furiously ; then to the door, and back again. When the music began again, he evidently gave up all hopes of making himself understood in that way, and running up to his little mistress, he seized her frock firmly in his teeth and pulled with all his might.

"O Miss Page !" pleaded Molly, "do let me see what he wants ; he must want something. And I promise to come straight back."

"Very well ; only remember you are not to dawdle about upstairs. Just see what it is he wants, and come back to your music."

Off flew Molly, Jack racing before her, across the hall, up the nursery staircase, and when she reached the landing she was greeted by a despairing cry in a feeble, croaky voice.

"Molly, Molly, do come quick ! I do so want you."

It was poor Bob, who had caught one of his sore throats. Molly ran into his room. There he was, sitting up in bed, looking very much inclined to weep, his face flushed with excitement, while round his neck was a red flannel bandage, and in his arms the Toby jug.

"O Molly !" he gasped, "I thought you

would never come. I've been calling for ages, but my throat's so sore I couldn't make any one hear."

"How clever of Jack!" cried Molly, as she gave him an approving pat; "he came and fetched me from the drawing-room, Bob. What is it you want?"

"I want the Toby jug put somewhere," he answered, in a hoarse whisper. "Auntie said she would come and sit with me at three o'clock; and when the clock struck, I was so afraid she'd come in and see the jug, and I couldn't get out of bed, as I'd faithfully promised Nannie I wouldn't move. Here she comes—hide it quick—do!"

Molly seized it, and had just time to put it safely away before her mother came in.

"Well, dear," she said, "I have just been to look for you in the drawing-room; but Miss Page told me that Jack had been behaving in such a manner that you had run up to see what was the matter. Was it really anything?"

"Oh, yes, mother. It was so good of Jack to fetch me. Bob had been calling for me, and no one heard."

"Well, then, now run back to your music; and I told Miss Page that if you were very attentive you could come up here as soon as your lesson is over. I have found a story to read aloud to Bob, and I expect you will like to hear it too."

Molly clapped her hands.

"How sweet of you, mother darling! I'll be as good as gold; and mind you don't even say the name of the story till I'm back," she added, as she ran off.

In half an hour she returned.

"Miss Page says I've been quite extra special good and attentive," she announced, as she danced into the room. "Now tell us about the story. Is it a new one? and where did you find it? And oh! I hope it's a fairy one."

"What a string of questions all at once! Yes, it is a fairy story, an old one which I had lost, till I found it when turning out my large bureau. Now I am going to read it to you, and when I have ended you must both tell me what you think of it, and perhaps I shall tell you who wrote it."

"Of course you will," said Molly decidedly, as she and Jack curled themselves up at the foot of Bob's bed. "Now we're quite ready for you to begin."

"The story is called, 'In the Land of the Snow Queen,'" began mother.

"What a nice name!" broke in Molly hastily. "I'd much rather meet the Snow Queen than any of the other fairies."

"Molly," Bob remonstrated huskily, "will you shut up and not interrupt so? Go on, please, auntie dear."

So mother began again.

"IN THE LAND OF THE SNOW QUEEN.

"Old Peter, the woodman, lived on the borders of those lands where the Snow Queen reigns supreme.

"Behind his hut, as far as the eye could see, stretched hills and dales, all covered with a soft mantle of glistening, sparkling, white snow. In front of it lay the pine forests, dark and gloomy; and in these Old Peter worked all day, striving to earn a scanty living by wood-cutting.

"But hard as he had to work, and poor as he certainly was, he had one possession for which any one might have envied him, and which he himself would not have exchanged for all the wealth in the world.

"This was his little, golden-haired grand-child Mimosa.

"How can I describe her to you? She was beautiful, of course. Her bright curls looked as if the sun was always shining on them; her eyes were the colour of a mountain stream on a clear day; and her laugh was the merriest, joyfullest sound you ever heard.

"Now Mimosa's mother had been—well, not quite a fairy, but a very near connection; for of course you know that in those countries where the fairies still have haunts, and mix sometimes with people, you can be a little bit of a fairy, just the same as in our land you can be a little bit Scotch or Irish.

"Not only had her mother been half a fairy, but Mimosa had for her godmother no less a person than the Snow Queen herself. That, of course, accounted for the fact that, winter and summer, through all the frost and snow,

the bushes of mimosa round Old Peter's hut were always in bloom, and however deep the snow might be all around, it never blocked his door nor lay in his garden.

"When Peter went to his work in the morning, Mimosa was left alone for the day, with never a chance of seeing any one to speak to, unless, indeed, it were Hans.

"Hans lived in the village far away in the valley below, and sometimes he came to buy her grandfather's wood. But Mimosa did not like Hans, and it is better to see no one than a person you dislike.

"Now it so happened that one beautiful sunshiny day Mimosa came out of the hut and stood gazing up at the snow-covered hills.

"'Oh dear!' she sighed aloud, 'if only I had some one to play with, how happy I should be!'

"'What is this I hear?' said a soft voice beside her; 'my godchild wishes for some one to play with? Well, I believe there is a young friend of mine who wants a playfellow too. Suppose you come and see.'

"Mimosa started and turned round, and there

was the Snow Queen seated in her white chariot, and holding out her hand invitingly.

"Mimosa was delighted. In she sprang and seated herself beside her fairy godmother, and as the soft white clouds which acted as horses to this wonderful carriage rose swiftly into the air with a hundred tiny snowstorms whirling before them as outriders, she clapped her hands with pleasure.

"Now perhaps it may strike you that to go for a drive with the Snow Queen might be rather cold work; but that is quite a mistake, for though we feel the snow cold when we are meeting it, it is quite warm and sheltered *behind* a snowstorm. So Mimosa was able thoroughly to enjoy her drive, and chattered away fearlessly to her godmother, and was quite sorry when the fairy carriage began to descend to the earth again.

"Suddenly she caught sight of a patch of brilliant blue on the white ground, and as she drew nearer she saw that it was a mass of flowers.

"‘O godmother!’ she cried, ‘how lovely! Do let me get down and gather some.’

"The Snow Queen smiled instead of answering.

"'Gentian!' she called, 'Prince Gentian! here is a little friend of mine come to play with you.'

"As she spoke they reached the ground, and she gently pushed Mimosa from the chariot, which rose again at once and soared away out of sight.

"Mimosa gazed around in astonishment. At the Snow Queen's call, a beautiful young prince had risen from the bank of flowers, and now he sprang towards her. He was dressed entirely in the bright, rich blue of the gentian, while his gleaming, merry eyes seemed to have been made to match.

"'Welcome, Mimosa!' he cried, as he took her hands; 'I have been waiting for you for such a long time. The fairies promised me a playfellow, to whom I might show myself without fear. I often watch mortals' children playing, and long to join them; but our fairy laws forbid it. But now you have come, we shall be so happy together.'

"'But I am only a mortal!' cried Mimosa,

in bewilderment; 'how can you show yourself to me?'

"'You are in part a fairy yourself,' the prince answered joyously; 'it is by special leave from our queen that you are here. If I were to allow an ordinary human being to see me, I should be banished for ever from Fairyland. Now come, you must see some of my subjects.'

"So hand in hand they wandered over the hills, visiting the scattered patches of blue gentians, and, when they were tired, sitting together, talking and laughing merrily.

"Evening came, and the prince took her home to the hut, in time to welcome Old Peter after his day's work.

"From that time never a day passed but they met, and many were the wonderful things which Mimosa saw. Together one day they visited the great golden eagle, who, taking them on his back, flew with them to visit all the farthest and most inaccessible parts of the prince's dominions. Then another day they went to see the fairies of the glacier, who wove a wonderful robe for Mimosa, of

the soft blue-green colour of glacier ice, and which grew with her as she grew taller, and could never spoil or wear.

"So time passed, and every day Mimosa grew more beautiful, until Hans, when he came to buy her grandfather's wood, could scarcely take his eyes from her face, and began to envy Peter his one treasure.

"'Let me have Mimosa,' he said one day; 'she is wasted up here with no one to see her beauty. Let her come to the town and wed me, and I will give her many fine clothes, instead of that one dress she always wears.'

"Old Peter shook his head.

"'She is too young to leave me yet, Hans,' he answered; 'have patience and wait a little longer.'

"'I will wait a short time,' said Hans gloomily; 'but mind, if you keep me too long, I shall not want any more of your wood,' and with that threat he left them.

"'O grandfather!' sobbed poor Mimosa, 'don't let him have me; I do hate him so!'

"'I don't like him, my child,' answered Old Peter sadly; 'but what can I do? If he

ceases to buy my wood, we must starve, for I know no one else who would take it. We must hope. Who knows? he may change his mind!’

“A few days after this Old Peter was taken very ill, and in a short time he died, leaving Mimosa alone.

“When the news reached Hans he came at once to the hut in the hills.

“‘Now, Mimosa,’ he said, taking her hand with a scarcely concealed smile of triumph, ‘you will come home with me to-morrow.’

“But Mimosa snatched away her hand.

“‘No!’ she cried angrily; ‘I intend to live here by myself.’

“Hans’s smile grew still more disagreeable.

“‘You can scarcely do that,’ he said; ‘for when your grandfather died he owed me money, and as he has left none to repay me I shall take his furniture instead. To-morrow morning I shall come with my friends and take it home, and you too. So good-bye till then,’ and with a laugh of triumph and a parting wave of his hand he left her.

“Mimosa sat down and gave way to de-

spairing tears, till, like a flash, an idea struck her.

“‘O dear Snow Queen!’ she sobbed, ‘come and help me and protect me.’

“‘I was wondering how long it would be before you thought of me,’ came in a gentle voice as the Snow Queen appeared in the doorway. ‘Leave off crying, like a good child, and I will bring such a snowstorm as you have never seen, and it will need sharper eyes than mortals’ to discover your hut. You need not be frightened, for I will leave your door open, and by to-morrow Prince Gentian will come and take you away.’

“‘Thank you, dear godmother!’ said grateful Mimosa; ‘I shall not be the least afraid of the snow.’

“‘There is one thing you must remember,’ said the Snow Queen impressively. ‘This hut is now under fairy protection, and if you allow mortal eyes to look on the interior my power to protect you ceases, and the snow which hides it will vanish,’ and with this parting warning she was gone.

“Then the snow began. You never saw

such snow. It came down in great soft clouds, covering the hut, till nothing was to be seen of it, while the wind whistled and roared over the world of white.

"But inside it was warm and cosy, and Mimosa went to bed and slept peacefully till morning. It was still early when Prince Gentian's voice was heard outside.

"‘Well, you are well hidden,’ he cried, as he came in; ‘why, it took even me some time to find the entrance; and the wind is so biting that no mortal could live in it.’

"You can imagine how pleased Mimosa was to see Gentian, and how much she had to tell of all that had happened. When he had listened to it all, Gentian looked rather grave.

"‘I am afraid you will have to stay here alone a little longer,’ he said, ‘while I go to find the Queen of the Fairies. When I have got her permission, I will come to fetch you home to my own castle in Fairyland, which I have always longed to show you.’

"Then they began to make all sorts of plans as to the happy life they would lead

once Mimosa was really admitted to Fairy-land; and they were so busy talking that the time passed quickly.

"Suddenly they heard a faint cry from outside.

"'Help!' a voice said, 'help me, or I perish!'

"Mimosa ran to the door and peeped out. There in the snow a man was lying moaning faintly.

"'Gentian,' she whispered, 'I must go to him; he will be frozen in a few minutes if he stays there.'

"The prince nodded, and together they went out to the prostrate figure and tried to rouse it. It was Hans, who, overcome by the cold, had sunk down in a stupor.

"'We must carry him in to the warmth,' said Gentian, after trying in vain to revive him; 'we cannot let him die out here and do nothing to help.'

"So together they dragged him into the hut and laid him before the fire. In a short time he opened his eyes and looked up at his preservers.

"Then a dreadful thing happened. A mighty blast shook the walls of the hut, and the snow which had covered it so securely from view was swept from it and whirled away.

" 'Disobedient prince,' an angry voice cried, 'you, who have broken the fairies' law, and allowed a mortal to look upon you, are banished from Fairyland.'

"Straightway a black cloud fell upon Prince Gentian, wrapping him round, and in another moment he had vanished from Mimosa's sight. But as he disappeared she caught his parting words, 'Fly, Mimosa! follow where the gentians lead you.'

"Mimosa looked round in terror. Hans had now recovered consciousness, and was struggling to his feet; and when she saw this, Mimosa turned and fled. Outside the hut there was a sound of talking, and she saw a party of men approaching—Hans's friends coming to help to remove the furniture, no doubt. She looked round in despair, and there, over the snow, stretched a bright blue path of gentians.

"In a moment Mimosa was following it as fast as she could run; and as she went the path grew before her, while behind her it vanished as she passed. On and on she sped, hearing as she went the voices of the men who had, she felt sure, started in pursuit.

"At last she began to feel that she could go no further; her feet ached with running so far on the hard, cold snow, and her breath came in short gasps. She told herself that she would struggle on to the top of this last hill, and then, if no help came, she must lie down and rest.

"With a great effort she reached the summit, and there she stopped with a cry of alarm. Before her the hillside was broken by a mighty chasm, so deep that to look down it even made her giddy. Yet when she gazed across it she could see the path of gentians shining blue on the farther side.

"But how could she ever reach it? She looked about in hopeless misery, when, lo! at her feet she found a huge block of ice, smooth and round, and on it still more gentians. Evidently it was meant for her. But one

cannot stand on an ice-block, so she sat down on it, holding tight with both hands.

"No sooner was she seated than the block began to move. At first it glided slowly down the incline towards the precipice. Then the speed increased, and soon Mimosa was rushing through the air at a breathless rate. She shut her eyes and clung tightly to the cold mass, almost helpless with terror. The wind whistled loudly in her ears as her strange conveyance rushed onwards."





THE LAND OF THE SNOW QUEEN.

(Continued.)

“**W**HEN Mimosa opened her eyes she found herself lying on the snow, with no sign of the magic ice-block to be seen. She sprang up and gazed around her. Yes; there still was the path of gentians, disappearing abruptly round a mountain corner. A few steps brought her to the turning—and then what a sight met her eyes!

“Before her lay a lovely valley, a tiny streamlet running through it, all round a perfect sheet of bright gentians, covering the snow from sight, and in the midst a tiny cottage.

“It was certainly meant for her to go to, Mimosa reflected; and as she ran towards it whom should she see standing in the doorway but the Snow Queen herself!

“‘O godmother!’ she cried, ‘I do hope you have forgiven me.’

“‘I do not like to be disobeyed,’ answered the Snow Queen, ‘but still, as it was to save a mortal you did it, I suppose I must forgive you. For I am very fond of mortals, though they, poor blind things, always look upon me as their enemy.’

“‘Then if you forgive me,’ pleaded Mimosa, ‘tell me where Prince Gentian is.’

“‘He is banished by the queen to the farthest part of his dominions,’ answered her godmother.

“‘But may I follow him and find where he is?’ Mimosa eagerly asked.

“‘Now, my child, listen attentively to me,’ the fairy answered gravely. ‘You could never find him, and I cannot help you. I have done all in my power for you by bringing you to this place of safety; and it has been more difficult than you can understand. Follow the bank of this stream for a short distance and you will see green trees and meadows on the other side. Across this stream you must never go till the Queen of

the Fairies bids you, for over there is a part of Fairyland. Now her majesty is very fond of bathing, and daily comes down to this stream for an early bathe. If every morning she finds an offering of choice flowers waiting for her, perhaps some time she may be tempted to accept them, for she dearly loves flowers. She, being a queen, must forgive any one from whom she takes a present.'

"'Thank you, dear godmother, for telling me,' cried Mimosa; 'and surely there cannot be more beautiful flowers than those I am surrounded by,' she added hopefully.

"The Snow Queen smiled.

"'It is these flowers that may lead to your being pardoned,' she said. 'When Prince Gentian was banished, he ordered all his loyal subjects to keep guard over you; and now, on all the hills around, even in Fairyland itself, there is not a gentian to be seen. Naturally we are all annoyed, and want our gentians back again; therefore I say, *hope!*'

"Days and weeks passed, and every morn-

ing Mimosa laid her offering ready, only to see the Fairy Queen glance at it, then pass by. Poor Mimosa! she had no one to speak to, and as time went on she grew more and more miserable and despairing.

“At last one morning, as she stood at the door of her cottage thinking she must soon start to gather her usual offering of flowers which was never looked on with favour, her attention was attracted by an advancing figure at the far end of the valley. She started forwards, and then stood staring in astonishment.

“A man was coming slowly down the snow-covered hillside. He seemed bent and worn, and limped as he walked. As she watched him, his strength seemed to fail, and he sank down just as he reached the outskirts of the bright mass of gentians which filled the valley.

“Mimosa started off towards him at a run, delighted at the thought of having any one to speak to in her solitude. But when she reached him she shrank back with a cry of terror, for it was Hans.

"But such a changed Hans that it was difficult to recognize him. His face was pale and thin, his clothes hung upon him in rags, and his boots were nearly worn off his feet.

" 'Mimosa,' he called to her, 'don't fly from me, I implore you. I have sought you all these long weeks, hoping to know that you were not really dead.'

"Mimosa drew nearer.

" 'What made you think I was dead?' she inquired.

" 'When the men who followed you returned,' answered Hans, 'they told me that you had certainly fallen over a terrible precipice they came to, and that you must have been killed long before you could reach the bottom. Having heard this, I at once set out in search of you; but when I got to the precipice I found I had to follow it for many days' journey before getting to a spot where I could descend into the chasm. Once down there, I wandered for many days; and finding no trace of you, I knew that you were not really killed. At last I found a way out, and dragged myself here.

And now I am very feeble, for all these weeks I have lived only on such berries as I could gather.'

"'Poor Hans!' said Mimosa, pitying him, and she ran to fetch him food, which she set before him, as he lay exhausted on the hill-side.

"Soon he begged her to tell him the story of her adventures, and, nothing loth, she complied, for the pleasure of hearing her own voice was great, after the weeks of silence and solitude.

"When he heard how much harm he had done her, Hans was very unhappy; for during his wanderings in search of Mimosa he had learned to repent of his unkindness to her.

"'I am truly sorry, Mimosa,' he cried. 'I have followed you all this weary way only to ask for your forgiveness; and now I know all the harm I have done, I fear that you will never pardon me;' and two big tears ran down his cheeks and fell on to the bunch of gentians which Mimosa held in her hand.

"'Let us forget all, Hans,' she answered, when she saw how sorry he was. 'But now

you must leave me, for it is time I go to lay my flowers ready for the queen. I do not think you will find it so difficult to return as it was to come here, for I shall ask my fairy godmother to help you;’ and waving her hand in farewell, Mimosa ran down the valley, to place her flowers on the bank of the stream and watch for the arrival of the Fairy Queen.

“Very sad and hopeless she felt too as she sat and waited, hidden by the branches of a tree; and when she saw the queen approaching, followed by her brilliant train of attendant fairies, she scarcely raised her eyes to watch them.

“She was suddenly roused, however, by hearing a little cry of pleasure, and peeping out, she saw the Fairy Queen with the bunch of gentians in her hand.

“‘This is indeed a gift I love,’ cried her majesty, ‘for on these flowers have been shed the precious tears of a repentant mortal. Come, Mimosa, I have accepted your offering, and I must forgive your disobedience.’

“And when Mimosa crept out from her

hiding-place the queen took her by the hand and led her over the stream into the fairy dominions ; and there she saw Prince Gentian springing joyously forward to meet her.

“So Gentian and Mimosa, their troubles over, were admitted to Fairyland, and there they lived happily ever afterwards.”

* * * *

Mother stopped and looked round.

“Well, children,” she said, “and how do you like it?”

“It is a lovely story, auntie dear,” said Bob ; “thank you so much.”

“I like it very much too,” chimed in Molly ; “but why have you never told us it before, mother ? You said you could not find a single fairy story that you had not already read about two or three times only the other day,” she added reproachfully.

“I had quite forgotten all about this one till I found it yesterday,” answered mother.

Molly was peeping over her shoulder.

“Mother,” she cried, “I believe you wrote that story yourself, for I am quite sure it

is not in 'printing' writing. I've been watching you turning over the pages, and they went much too quick."

Mother laughed.

"Really, Molly, you are much too quick also. You are quite right, though—I did write that story myself. I was quite a little girl, not much older than you two, when one of my aunts offered a prize, for the best fairy story, to my cousins, sisters, and myself."

"And did you win it?" inquired Bob eagerly.

"Yes, I did; and I felt very proud, I remember," answered mother, smiling to herself at the recollection. "The little writing-case I use now was then given to me, and it has been one of my 'treasures' ever since."

"How very clever you must have been when you were little," sighed Molly, "and how I wish I could write a story like that!"

"Well, darling, you might try," said mother. "Then you could give it to me for a present, and it would be another treasure."

Molly looked doleful.

"I could never do it; and you would make such fun of the spelling."

Both mother and Bob laughed.

"My dear child, there is such a thing as a dictionary," said mother. "And now I must go and give father his tea, or he will think I am lost," she added, as she got up; "and you and Jack can stay with Bob till Nannie brings him his tea."

No sooner was her mother out of the room than Molly sprang up and fetched the Toby jug from its hiding-place.

"Bob dear," she cried, as she scrambled back on to his bed again, with the jug clasped fondly in her arms, "I have got a lovely idea. We must write a story all about this Toby, and then we can give the story to mother and the jug to father, and it will be a present for each of them. Isn't it a good plan?"

"Yes," said Bob, looking rather doubtful, "I suppose it is. I'll tell you what, though," he went on eagerly, as a bright idea struck him, "you shall make up the story—I'm quite sure I could not if I tried

ever so much—and I'll write it out in my very neatest writing, and paint all the capital letters, like in old manuscripts. What is the word for it?"

"Illuminate," suggested Molly.

"Yes, that's it," continued Bob, nodding. "I'll illuminate it, and bind it; then, you see, it will be a present from both of us."

"That will do beautifully," said Molly complacently; "and I almost think, Bob dear, you might find out how to spell all the difficult words."

"You are a lazy little wretch," answered Bob; "but if I don't, you're sure to spell them all wrong, so I suppose I must."

Molly gave him a most indignant glance.

"You are horrid!" she said; "I am not lazy. I've got all the thinking part to do, and of course that's much the hardest work. What a funny little figure this is too—just like a comical dwarf!" she added, as she held out the green-and-white Toby.

"I think he looks just like a mischievous little gnome who's been turned to stone in a moment. Look at the way his mouth curls

up at the corners, just as if he were on the point of laughing; and how he is holding his knees with his hands, just as uncle does when he laughs a great deal at me," said Bob, as he fondled it.

Molly was sitting gazing proudly at their treasure, when suddenly she sprang up and held out her hands for it.

"Bob," she cried, "we've never taken off its cap. Don't you remember?—Green's one had a hat which came right out; and Mrs. Green said they were used for drinking beer out of. We might drink some tea out of ours."

Bob sat up in bed and tried to get the queer green cap off, but it refused to move.

"It must have got stuck," he said.

"Let me try," cried Molly, seizing it eagerly, and trying in vain to move it.

"Do take care," entreated Bob, "I know you'll break it.—Oh! what have you done?" he added distractedly, as there was a sudden rattle.

Molly stood still in horrified amazement, gazing at the Toby.

"What is the matter with it?" she said wildly; "it sounds broken, but I can't see anything."

Then she moved it, very cautiously this time.

Again the mysterious rattle.

"I do believe I have not broken it at all," she cried triumphantly; "there is something loose shaking about inside—just listen," and she moved the Toby jug about again, shaking it gently.

"It sounds just like a china money box with pennies inside," said Bob. "Whatever it is it must have got moved when you shook it. You must not try to force the cap off again, Molly; you might really break it next time."

"No, I won't," said Molly. "It's so delightfully mysterious not knowing what it is; it might be all sorts of wonderful things. And when I make my story I've thought of a very good reason for it. I shall say that his heart was turned to stone, and could be heard rattling inside him."

And quite pleased with her own explanation, Molly carefully wrapped the Toby jug

up again, and put it away in its hiding-place.

The next few days were wet and stormy, and Bob, whose throat was still sore, was not allowed out at all; while Molly and Jack only went for a short run round the gardens in the pouring rain.

How Jack did dislike the rain too! and what a dejected little dog he looked when he came in wet and muddy! But, of course, if his little mistress insisted on going out he must follow, however disagreeable it might be; for Jack's devotion knew no limits, and was not bounded by his own pleasure.

And Molly deserved his devotion, I think; for Jack, to her, was not just a pet or a toy to be made much of while he was young and handsome, and then abandoned for something better. He was her friend and companion, who, when he grew old and rheumatic, and lost all his teeth, would only be the dearer and the more tenderly cared for.

I often hear children nowadays talking of their dogs as if they were like clothes, to be changed when they get old and worn out,

or when they want a new one. Then they wonder how it is that their pets do not seem very devoted. But I don't—dogs know the value of loyal affection as well as any one does.

Owing to the bad weather giving them more time indoors, Molly and Bob occupied themselves over their story, and they were very proud of it when it was finished.

And this was their story.





CHAPTER VI.

THE GREEN DWARF.

“ONCE upon a time, ever so long ago, when there were lots of fairies all about, there lived a gnome.

“He was the funniest little figure you ever saw; and his dress was funny too, for his coat and knee-breeches were of green and white, in broad stripes, and on his head he wore a long, pointed green cap. “The Green Dwarf” he was called by the fairies around.

“His home was on a wide moorland, with only a few little cottages dotted about; but by the few neighbours he had he was dreaded and disliked, for the Green Dwarf was never out of mischief! He chased the chickens all round, pinched the children as they passed, and stole the clothes that were hung out to dry. It was in vain that the

Fairy Queen reproved him and threatened him with all kinds of punishments. The Green Dwarf never could resist the chance of teasing any unfortunate mortal who happened to come in his way.

“One day, as he was wandering over the moors in search of some amusement, he came upon a poor boy—such a ragged little fellow, evidently a foreigner and a stranger to the country, for he carried a concertina under his arm, and gazed about timidly, as if uncertain which way to go.

“The Green Dwarf slipped on to a tuft of heather and made a low bow to the wondering and admiring boy. Then seeing he had attracted the little fellow’s attention, he started off running and bounding over the heather for a short distance, then stopped and looked round.

“The boy was following as fast as he could, stumbling over the rough ground, and quite forgetting that he was leaving the path in his desire to overtake the queer little figure before him.

“And what did this wicked Green Dwarf

do, but lead him gradually further and further from the road and on to the most dangerous part of the moorland. Then, when it was too late, the poor child found that he was slipping and sinking in the treacherous black bog; and the more he struggled the deeper he sank. In his efforts to free himself he let go his hold on his precious concertina, and with a cry of despair he saw it sink and disappear in the dreadful black mud.

“Meanwhile the mischievous dwarf had seated himself on a stone close by, and, with his hands resting on his knees, was indulging in peals of laughter as he watched the struggles of his unfortunate victim, when a voice spoke to him.

“‘O wicked and unfeeling Green Dwarf!’ it said angrily, ‘now the time for you to be punished has really come. In that position you shall remain, turned into a figure of china, as cold and hard as yourself; and until you can find some way of getting rid of the hard lump into which your heart has turned, and which rattles about inside you, you will never be forgiven.’

"The Green Dwarf was terrified. He tried to cry out and implore for mercy, but no voice came. Then he struggled vainly to rise, but his limbs were rigid and immovable. He tried to look round, but his eyes were fixed, and he could only gaze straight before him; while his lips were set in the smile they had worn when punishment had overtaken him.

"By this time the little boy had struggled out of the bog, and seeing the little figure perched motionless on the stone, he came up to it, at first with some fear; but finding it did not move, he grew bolder, and picked it up.

" 'Why, it's a china figure!' he exclaimed, with delight. 'Perhaps if I take it to the nearest village I may be able to sell it and get money to buy another concertina.'

"Then he shook it up and down, and tried to get the cap off to discover what was rattling inside; and the dwarf was full of hopes that he would get rid of his tiresome heart. But no! The boy was afraid of breaking his new treasure, and finding how fast the cap was stuck, he gave up trying, and set off to find the path.

"Towards evening he came to a village. As he entered the street a kind-looking man on his way home from work said 'Good-evening' as he passed.

"The little boy stopped him, and, showing the Green Dwarf, begged in his broken English to be directed to some shop where he could sell it.

"The man took it in his hands and looked at it with interest.

" 'They might buy it at the china shop,' he said. 'But I've taken a great fancy to it, and as it's my little girl's birthday to-day, I might have it if you don't want too much for it.'

"So, after a short discussion as to the price, the Green Dwarf changed owners, and was carried off by the workman. When he reached his cottage, a pretty little girl came running out to meet him.

" 'See, Sally!' cried the man. 'Look what a funny present I've brought you.'

"And the child laughed and clapped her hands with delight; and then she rattled the dwarf about so much to find out what was

inside him that every moment he hoped that his heart might fall out. But again they were afraid of breaking him, so he was set on the chimney-piece in the place of honour, and soon became Sally's greatest treasure.

"And there the Green Dwarf remained.

"Years passed, and the little girl grew to be a woman, while her father grew old and feeble, and at last died.

"After that the Green Dwarf was more of a treasure than ever, and every day his owner dusted him carefully, and then replaced him on the chimney-piece. But, oh! how he wished that she would drop him by mistake, so that he might be broken, and the hard lump which rattled about in place of his heart allowed to escape.

"But no such lucky chance ever befell the poor dwarf, and after some years more of waiting, his mistress, who was now quite an old woman, also died. Then he was taken away by strange people and sold to a shop-keeper who kept a china stall in the market-place.

"After being shut up for ever so many

years in one small room, this was a delightful change to the Green Dwarf, and for some days he sat on the stall watching the busy scene around with great interest.

“And there a little boy and girl saw him; and bought him, and carried him away for a present to the little girl’s father.

“So the Green Dwarf came to a new home. And still the hard lump rattles about where his heart ought to be, and still he lives in hopes that somehow he may get rid of it, and be forgiven some day.”

* * * *

This was their story when it was finished; and it looked very grand in Bob’s neatest writing, with the title and all the capital letters painted in green paint, while the sheets were tied together with green ribbons.

Of course it took quite a long time to finish, and a great many of the big words had to be hunted for in the dictionary. But then, as Molly remarked, if they only used short ones, it would be just like a “Reading-made-easy” story, and that would not be at all suitable as a present for mother.

Then Bob declared there must be stops and commas "all over the place." He did not in the least see the use of them, he said, but real books were full of them, so theirs must be also; and Miss Page was called upon to fill them in. It was also at her suggestion that the story was written all in one piece. Molly was most anxious to divide it into half a dozen chapters at least; but when her governess assured her that that would make it look quite like a baby story, she spent some time diligently counting the words in a "Little Folks" chapter, after which she announced that they would have it all in one, as she had no idea such a heap of words went in that silly printing writing!

By the time the story was completed Bob's throat was quite well again, and as the weather had turned fine and cold, the two children were able to play out of doors, and to amuse themselves with mysterious preparations, in which both Miss Page and Nannie joined.

And it was just as well that they had something to distract their thoughts from

their secret present, or they would never have managed to keep it as a surprise till the great day arrived.

One morning at breakfast, a few days before mother's winter birthday, father turned to the two children.

"Well, and have you two decided yet what sort of a treat you are going to give mother and me on our winter birthday?"

"Yes, we've quite decided," cried Molly, without an instant's hesitation. "We've got a lovely surprise to amuse you; and after that's over we will dance. And please, father, we do want the fiddler without any legs to come and play for us."

Father laughed, and asked teasingly,—

"Do you mean to tell me that you intend mother and me to spend the day dancing with you and Bob, while Crofts plays the fiddle?"

Molly wriggled impatiently, saying,—

"You know I don't, father; of course we want other people invited. Mother will ask some of her friends, and we'll have all the servants and Green and his wife. And we'll

amuse them first; afterwards we will all dance. And I think you might get us the man without any legs—Crofts, do you call him?—to play.”

“Well, as you seem to have quite made up your mind to have that particular musician,” he said, “I think you had better come with me this afternoon, and we can go and engage his services.”

Molly sprang from her chair, and running round to her father, gave him a grateful hug.

“You dear father!” she cried, “the man without the legs to play, and a walk with you!”

So that afternoon Molly set out with her father, in the highest spirits, dancing along by his side. For of all the pleasures which she enjoyed, none was quite so dear to her as a walk alone with father. Bob was very nice to run races with, and mother could tell lovely stories, and Nannie was a delightfully funny person to talk to, but father was best of all.

He listened with such a very interested ex-

pression to all her chatter; and then he was so big and tall, and took such long strides, that it was a perpetual struggle to keep in step. Molly got so hot with her efforts to do so that her cheeks almost matched the red of her best coat and cap, which she had insisted on wearing in honour of the occasion.

When they reached the cottage where Crofts the fiddler lived, their knock was answered by an old woman.

"Good-day, Mrs. Crofts," said Molly's father. "We have come to see your son. My little girl is very anxious to have him to play dance music for her party next week."

Mrs. Crofts smiled and curtsied.

"Won't you take a seat, sir?" she said; "I'll just go and tell my son."

She went to the little, narrow wooden staircase which led up from a door in the corner of the sitting-room and called out.

Molly could hear some one moving about above, and she listened with great interest, wondering how the fiddler would get downstairs.

Now, the man without any legs, as Molly

insisted on calling him, had in reality an extremely useful pair of wooden ones, which, from long practice, he had learned to use as cleverly as most people do their own. Not being fit for active work, he earned what he could by playing the fiddle at all village entertainments; and it was the sight of him beating time with one of his wooden legs which had so fascinated Molly that she had set her heart on having him to play.

When Crofts heard some one was waiting to see him he came quickly across his room and tap, tap, tap down the wooden staircase, till, as he neared the bottom, to Molly's horror, she knew he was running down!

"Oh, please stop!" she cried, springing off her chair and rushing to the stairs. "I am so afraid you'll fall down, and we are not at all in a hurry."

Crofts came more slowly down the last few steps, but when he emerged into the room he looked quite red and angry.

"I assure you, miss, I am no more likely to fall downstairs than you are," he said grumpily.

And even after father had explained what their errand was, he still remained decidedly surly. So, after arranging at what hour he was to come, and injunctions from Molly to play plenty of "Up the middle and down again," they took their departure.

"What did I say to offend him so, father?" said Molly plaintively, as soon as they were outside, "he seemed so angry."

"He did not like your talking of his falling down," answered father. "I know that he hates having attention drawn to his wooden legs. I am afraid you rather hurt his feelings."

Molly looked very dejected.

"I am sorry if I did, poor man," she said; "but I do seem to say unlucky things. I don't believe you ever hurt any one's feelings in your life, father," and she sighed deeply.

Just then father caught sight of a man whom he wanted to speak to.

"Wait here for me, Molly; I won't be a minute," he said, and he crossed the road and stood for a few moments talking to his friend.

When he turned round again Molly had disappeared; but on hearing him call, she came running out of the cottage which they had just left.

"Why, Molly, what did you go back for?" exclaimed father, in surprise; "had you left anything there?"

"No, father, but I was so sorry for having hurt the poor man's feelings, I just ran back and told him I should like to dance the first dance with him on next Tuesday. Wasn't it a good idea?" she added proudly.



CHAPTER VII

A BIRTHDAY PARTY.



The great day came at last.

Molly had lain awake so very long the night before, planning how early she would be up in the morning, that when it really came she slept on later than usual, and was only

roused by Nannie's voice.

"Wake up, Miss Molly," she said; "Master Bob is almost dressed, and is fidgeting to know how soon you will be ready to take your presents down and put them on the breakfast table."

Molly sprang up.

"O Nannie!" she cried reproachfully, "you should have called me sooner; I did mean to be up so very early."

Then she ran to the window and looked out. The day was dull and gloomy. Heavy banks of black clouds almost hid the hills from view, and a fierce wind whistled and shrieked round the old house. In the garden below, Green was passing along, his arms full of fresh plants for the drawing-room.

Molly threw up her window and leant out.

"Green," she called, "it looks so black, do you think it's going to rain?"

Green looked up to see where the voice came from.

"You take my word for it, Miss Molly," he said, nodding his head wisely, "we shall have a snowstorm before night, and a bad one too, or I'm very much mistaken."

Molly shut down the window with a bang, and began hurrying through her dressing, in frantic haste to get down and communicate her exciting weather report.

When mother and father entered the dining-room some time later they both gave an exclamation of surprise. There, in the centre of the table, was the quaint figure of the Green Dwarf, and at his feet, tied up

with a great deal of green ribbon to match, lay the story—*his* story, I should say.

They really were delighted with him. Molly and Bob were quite satisfied with the reception their presents received. Mother began reading their story while she ate her breakfast, and father held the Toby jug in his hands, turning him round and round to admire it.

At last Molly's impatience could stand it no longer.

"Do read your letters, father," she said imploringly.

Father glanced at the pile of letters by his plate. On the top lay a big, square envelope, addressed in large, childish writing. He picked it up and opened it. On a card inside was written, in neat letters:—

MOLLY AND BOB

"AT HOME,"

6 to 7, IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

1. N.B.—Mother is requested to provide refreshments.

2. N.B.—Father is requested to wear uniform.

Father burst out laughing, but when he came to the last line his face fell.

"O Molly!" he sighed, "how cruel of you! I am sure my uniform must be much too tight for me by this time."

But Molly looked at him severely.

"That's an excuse," she said; "I don't believe you're one inch bigger than last year. And what is the use of a father who has been a soldier, if he won't wear uniform and look beautiful at our party?"

"I shall be so hot," pleaded father.

"Green says it's going to snow, so you can't be hot," cried Molly conclusively; and father gave in.

Then he took up the Toby jug and began shaking it, trying to make out what was rattling inside, and making vain attempts to get the lid off; while the children looked on with much interest, and Molly urged him to help the poor Green Dwarf to get rid of his horrid hard heart.

At last mother interposed.

"I know you will break it before you have done," she said; "and, Molly, don't you think that if the fairies intend to forgive him, they will find some way for him to get

rid of his heart without your assistance?" And picking up the Toby jug, she set it in a place of safety on the mantelpiece.

But Molly shook her head.

"I thought father was sure to be able to get the top off," she said. "I do believe he really is some sort of fairy."

And in her heart, I think, Molly was rather afraid of the Toby jug, and felt very much relieved at having given him into some one else's keeping.

All that day a bustle of preparation pervaded the house, and Molly and Bob, with Jack at their heels, dashed up and down stairs from the nursery to the drawing-room, carrying all sorts of queer-shaped bundles in their arms.

At intervals Molly kept making expeditions to the garden door, to take a peep out and report on the weather.

Green's predictions were correct, for about midday the snow began. First a few soft white flakes, drifting lazily through the air, till after a time they increased to a blinding mass of whirling, dazzling white; and by the

time the curtains were drawn, they shut out a world covered with a soft, deep mantle of snow.

However, by six o'clock all the guests invited by mother had arrived. There were not very many of these; but Molly's invitations to her friends in the cottages round had been numerous, and when the drawing-room door was opened quite a crowd trooped in.

It was a big room, and looked very pretty when brightly lighted up, and with clusters of plants, specially arranged by Green for the occasion, in various groups. The curtains were drawn across the big bay-window, and all the chairs in the house were arranged in rows facing it, leaving no doubt in the minds of the audience as they seated themselves that theatricals were to be the order of the day.

And they, or rather the *tableaux vivants* which followed, were a great success, from the first one, "The Soldier Son's Return," in which Bob, arrayed in an old military great-coat many sizes too big for him, and his own toy helmet on his head, was peeping round

a screen at Nannie, who was got up to look like a very old woman nodding over her knitting near the fire, to the last one, "The Old and the New Year." In this, Molly, in a dress of shiny silver, advanced on to the stage, off which Bob, as a very old man with white hair and beard, was hobbling, leaning on a stick.

Every *tableau* was wildly applauded by the audience, the only drawback to Molly's satisfaction being that the spectators laughed quite as heartily at those *tableaux* meant to be tragic as at the comic ones.

Of course Jack took part in the performance, and was alternately a mad dog, a baby in long clothes, and a bloodhound.

When it was over, every one was ushered into the hall, where Miss Page at the piano and Crofts with his fiddle were in waiting, and dancing began.

Molly, still in her shining, silvery dress, which Nannie had made from an old ball-dress of mother's, with little wings of silver paper fastened to her shoulders, opened the dance by "Sir Roger de Coverley," father,

in all the glory of scarlet and gold lace, being her partner—Crofts, much to her relief, having gratefully but firmly declined that honour. And after dancing had gone on for some time, there was a delicious supper, provided by mother.

But in the middle of it, just as the fun was at its height, and the noise of crackers was becoming deafening, a message was brought in to say that the snow was falling so thickly that the visitors must start for their homes at once, as already the front drive was so blocked with drifts that they would have to get to their carriages from the back entrance. Of course, all the younger visitors were delighted at the novel idea of reaching their carriages by way of the kitchen and scullery, with the exciting possibility of being upset in a snow-drift on the way home.

There was a great deal of running up and down, of hustling on of cloaks and wraps, and hasty leave-takings, and before very long the last of the guests had been packed off on their cold drives home.

When Molly and Bob returned to the hall, Miss Page and Crofts were there, waiting to know if any more music would be required.

"Let us have another polka," cried father; "it will never do to go to bed so early as this on a birthday. Molly, you come and dance with me, and don't stay there in the draught with that thin frock on."

For Molly was standing close to the big glass doors which led into the conservatory; while Jack, his head cocked on one side, was sniffing about as if he scented something on the outside of them which he particularly wished to investigate.

"I can't make out what's the matter with Jack," said Molly, as she came forward into the hall rather unwillingly. "He generally hates the cold, so I am sure there must be something wrong to make him sit there in the draught."

But her father only laughed at her.

"It's only some fancy of his," he said. "Perhaps he hears the snow falling from the roof and thinks it a mouse."

Molly, however, had the greatest faith in Jack's intelligence, and all the time she was dancing she kept glancing at him as he wandered up and down before the closed doors, uneasy and restless.

At last, just as father stopped to take breath after his polka, Jack's patience quite gave out, and with a prolonged howl he began scratching wildly at the door.

Molly ran across the hall to open it, and in a moment Jack was through, while his little mistress stood gazing after him, curious to see what he would do next. And he did not hesitate a moment, but scampered straight down the conservatory, and began the same frantic scratching and whining at the front door.

"Molly, come here!" cried mother. "I told you not to go out there—come back at once!"

But Molly had already disappeared, and before any one could stop her, she was unfastening the front door.

When she turned the handle she was almost knocked over by a terrific gust of

wind, which sent a cloud of snow whirling into the conservatory. Outside, the snow was lying in great drifts, and all trace of the drive was lost. Still Jack did not hesitate, but plunged boldly in, sinking almost up to his neck in the soft mass, but struggling on, till he reached the side of a dark object lying in the midst of the sheet of dazzling white. Regardless of her thin dress and evening slippers, Molly followed, and in a moment she was kneeling beside a little figure lying stiff and cold, half buried in the snow.

"Father, father, come quick!" she cried, her voice shrill with terror; "it's a little boy, and I believe he's dead!"

In a second her father was beside her, and lifting the child tenderly in his arms, carried him into the hall. There, in a little time, the warmth seemed to revive him, and as his eyes slowly opened they fell upon Molly as she stood close beside him, her silver dress shining in the firelight, and her brown curls still covered with a sprinkling of snowflakes. The little boy gazed at her with an expres-

sion of wondering delight. Then a pleased smile broke over his face; but only for a moment—his eyes closed again, and he sank back into unconsciousness.

“Molly,” whispered Bob, in an awestruck voice, “it’s the little French boy we saw at Lee, and I do believe he knew you. Look, here’s his concertina under his arm.”

Molly nodded; then she looked up at her mother imploringly.

“You don’t think he’s going to die, do you?” she said, with a sob; “he does look so dreadfully bad.”

“I hope not, dear,” said mother gravely. “We shall do all we can for him, and you two must help me by going up and staying quietly in the nursery. And, Molly, promise me to take off your wet things at once, for I want Nannie with me.”

Molly promised. Then the two children crept upstairs to the nursery, where they waited with trembling eagerness, listening to the sounds of footsteps and lowered voices which every now and then they could catch from below.

Presently Bob looked up.

"Don't you think we had better say our prayers, and ask God to make the poor boy well again?" he said.

And Molly looked immensely comforted by the suggestion.

When mother entered the room a little later, two hopeful, smiling faces were turned to meet her.

"Children," she said, "I have just run up to tell you that I really think the poor boy is a little better."

"I knew he would be," said Molly cheerfully; "we have prayed so hard for him to get well."

Mother smiled, and said,—

"I'm afraid he is very far from being well yet—in fact, he is not even out of danger."

"If he doesn't get better, I'll never forgive that beastly Green Dwarf," Molly exclaimed fiercely. "I'm sure it's all his fault."

"The green Toby jug, do you mean?" said mother, in amazement. "Whatever has that to do with it, Molly?"

"In the story he made the little boy get lost; and then he made us lose our way; and

now I'm sure he had something to do with this poor little boy getting lost in the snow," murmured Molly confusedly. "I do believe he's really a bad fairy," she added, with conviction.

Mother looked much puzzled.

"What queer fancies children do get," she said to herself.

Then turning to Molly, she said aloud,—

"You know that is nonsense, dear. You two made up the story yourselves; and as to getting lost, it was your own fault for running off. This little boy has got funny fancies too," she added, smiling, "for he has been talking to himself, and he seems to have taken you for an angel, Molly. I suppose he caught sight of your shining dress and wings."

Molly's eyes grew round and awestruck, and she allowed mother to say good-night and tell them to go quickly to bed without another word.

But once in her own room an idea came into her head, and opening the door she flew softly downstairs, with her bare feet and in

her little red dressing-gown. When she reached the dining-room, it was almost dark, but the light of the dying fire guided her to the mantelpiece.

"Green Dwarf," she said aloud, "I believe it's all your fault, whatever people say; and if he does not get better, I'll never forgive you," and she stood on tip-toe and shook her little fist at the Toby jug. "I'll take you out and drop you into the duck pond, and I don't see how you'll get back to Fairyland from there," she added triumphantly.





CHAPTER VIII

JULES.

UT, after all, the little boy did not die; so Molly never fulfilled her threat, and the Toby jug was left to repose on the dining-room mantelpiece, although she still looked on it with a good deal of suspicion.

For some days the doctor came and went through the snow, and the two children were told to keep as quiet as possible, and not laugh and talk on their way downstairs, for fear of disturbing the little invalid.

They scarcely saw Nannie, who had become quite devoted to the poor little lad. He had been handed over to her care, in his half-frozen and starving condition, when found on the night of the birthday party.

the door to tell the children their visit had lasted long enough; and Bob rose and stood beside the bed, with a look of great determination on his round face.

"Never mind, Jules," he said encouragingly, "we'll promise to help you—won't we, Molly? I'll find out how much money it would cost to send you home, and then we'll try if we can't get it for you somehow."

The effect of these words was so cheering that mother, finding how much brighter the boy was after their visit, promised that they should go to see him again next day.

In the evening, as soon as Bob was seated beside his uncle at dessert, he began,—

"How much would it cost to go from here to Jules's home in the train?"

"Counting the boat and all, do you mean? And what class?" asked his uncle.

"Third class, and *all* the way," eagerly replied Bob.

"I cannot say without looking it up; but, if you like, I will get the railway guide presently and tell you," said his uncle.

"Oh dear! how I wish it were summer!"

broke in Molly suddenly, "then you might give us some weeding to do, or gooseberries to pick, and pay us. We are so dreadfully poor just now. Can't you think of some way for us to earn some money, father dear?"

"I can, Molly," said mother, looking up. "You and Bob can help to pick the currants for the Christmas puddings, and you shall have sixpence for doing enough for one pudding. Cook was saying to-day she wished she had some one to help her."

"Thank you, mother; we'll begin to-morrow. And now *do* say you've quite finished dessert, father, and come and look out the fares to Jules's home."

So father allowed himself to be led into the drawing-room, where he was set to the study of foreign railway guides, while the children watched him with great interest.

"As far as I can see," he announced, after a diligent search, "it costs two pounds, twelve shillings, and ninepence by the cheapest way from London to Marseilles; and once Jules got there, he would easily get

home, as your mother says he has relations living not far off.”

“And from here to London, how much does that cost?” inquired Bob.

“Thirteen shillings, third class; and I should think Jules would go for half-fare, as he can’t be over twelve, so that would be six and sixpence,” answered father, after consulting another guide.

“Six shillings and sixpence *and* two pounds, twelve shillings, and ninepence,” repeated Molly. “Please give me some paper and a pencil—quick, mother, and let me add it up before I forget.”

So saying, she established herself on the sofa, a pencil in one hand, with which she added up on the fingers of the other, and her forehead wrinkled into an anxious frown.

“Really, Molly,” exclaimed her mother reproachfully, “I do think you should be able to add two sums together without all this fuss. What would Miss Page say?”

“Miss Page says I’m a perfect dunce at sums,” answered Molly contentedly; “but when I’m grown up I shall make my hus-

band do all my addings up, so it really won't matter. Now don't interrupt for one minute, and let me get this right. Oh! I do believe I've got it. Two pounds, nineteen shillings, and three pennies! Is that right, father?"

"Quite right," he said; "but here comes Nannie to tell you that it is bed-time, so you must be off at once."

For a wonder Molly obeyed without a murmur.

"It does seem a lot of money, doesn't it, Bob?" she remarked thoughtfully, as they slowly followed Nannie upstairs. "I don't believe we shall ever make it."

"Well, we'll begin and collect at once," said Bob cheerfully. "I've got one shilling, and you've got ninepence, and to-morrow we'll begin and pick the currants."

But Molly shook her head despondently.

"I don't believe we should earn two pounds, nineteen shillings in sixpences if we picked currants from now till New Year; and I'm sure mother would not want enough puddings to use them if we did. I really can't bother to do another sum now, or I'd

add up and find how many sixpences it would take."

However, when the next morning came, Molly took a much more cheerful view of their chances of earning the money.

She and Bob set to work very diligently on the currants, and for several days they went proudly to mother to claim their sixpences.

Every evening, as soon as tea was over, they were allowed to pay Jules a short visit. He was still kept in bed, and was not able to talk much, as he often had fits of coughing; but his two visitors were quite content to sit and chatter gaily to him, and tell all their plans for paying his journey home themselves, without asking for help from "grown-up" people.

Molly also insisted on taking the Toby jug to exhibit to him, and told him all its wonderful adventures, real and imaginary. And Jules took an immense fancy to it—in his opinion it was a *good* fairy!—and he would lie contentedly in bed playing with it for hours, till father declared that he never saw anything of his birthday present.

But Jules was such a nice little boy, so well mannered, and showing himself so grateful for all the kindness he received, that every one was glad to see him so quiet and happy with his strange plaything.

"We've quite finished all the currants to-day, Jules," Molly announced one evening, as the two children entered his room. "Cook says she has enough now for more puddings than she knows what to do with."

"We must think of something else then," said Bob. "You make a plan, Molly—you're better at that than I am."

Molly shook her head.

"I'll have to think dreadful hard." Then turning to Jules she went on quickly: "What did you mean to do to earn money here, if you had not got lost in the snow?"

"I should have played my concertina and sung little songs outside people's windows, *mam'selle*," he answered. "Sometimes I have earned quite a lot by doing that; and round here I was told there were many houses where I could try."

"I should like to learn to play on your

concertina," said Bob suddenly. "Molly and I know several little French songs, and I can pick out a tune on the piano with one finger when I've heard it a great many times;" and he hummed the first few bars of a little song which Miss Page had taught them to sing together.

"I know that one! Pray give me my concertina and let me show you," cried Jules, in a delighted tone; and when it was handed to him, he played the tune through as he lay in bed.

Then Bob had a try, and managed to play it after a fashion; but before he had got it quite to his own satisfaction Nannie came to call them away.

"May we take it upstairs with us, Jules?" said Molly, "and then Bob can practise it; and we'll promise to be very careful of it."

Jules agreed at once, and said that if he might have the green Toby jug to keep him company, they might have his concertina for as long as they liked.

"You had better begin and practise to get that thing right at once," said Molly the

moment they entered the nursery, "and don't talk to me. I've got the beginning of a lovely plan in my head, but I can't tell it to you till I've thought all about it."

So Bob, although filled with curiosity, sat down obediently with the concertina, and produced such dismal sounds from it that Jack set up a frantic howling as accompaniment.

"Shut up, you silly dog!" growled Bob crossly.

Molly looked up indignantly.

"He's not silly, for you are making a hideous noise; but you've got to play the thing somehow, or my plan will be no good, so we must endure it. I'll hold your ears for you, Jack," she added, as she took him on her knee.

Presently she gave a shout of triumph.

"I have it, Bob!" she cried; "you and I will go round and sing instead of Jules. You'll play that thing, and we'll sing in French. I can easily dress up to look quite poor, and you can wear Jules's clothes. I saw them in his room to-day."

"But people will recognize us," objected Bob.

"We won't go till after dark, and not to any one we know well."

But Bob still looked doubtful.

"We shall never be allowed to go out after dark," he said.

"What a stupid you are!" she exclaimed. "Unless I'd arranged all that, I should not have told you I'd got a good plan. We'll go to-morrow night. Father and mother will be out late—I heard them say so; and as it's a half-holiday, Miss Page will go before tea. So when Nannie takes away the tea-things, we'll say we are not quite ready to go down to see Jules, and she won't bother about us again for an hour or more."

"Then it's to be a secret?" said Bob thoughtfully. "But suppose Nannie comes up to look for us while we are out?"

"She will only think we are downstairs; and it will be twice as much fun if we keep it quite a secret. The only difficulty is Jack;" and Molly looked quite distressed.

"He can't go with us," answered Bob, with determination; "we could never make Jack look poor. He must be left shut up."

Molly looked very much inclined to cry.

"His feelings will be so dreadfully hurt. I've never had a plan before that he couldn't share in. It will be fun, though," she went on more cheerfully. "Promise me, Bob, not to tell anything about it."

"As if I should!" cried Bob indignantly. "You're much more likely to—you're the poorest hand at keeping a secret. And you must not say a word about it, even afterwards, till I give you leave, not if we have ever such adventures."

And Molly promised.





CHAPTER IX

MOLLY'S PLAN.

“**J**ACK, go in! I tell you you can't come.
O Bob, what shall I do with him?”

Molly's tone was desperate. She and Bob were standing at the nursery door ready to set off on their adventures.

Molly, in an old frock, torn red apron, a shawl tied round her, and a handkerchief covering her head, was a good imitation of a little street singer; while Bob, arrayed in Jules's clothes, looked the character to the life.

Everything had happened as they had

planned ; and now there was nothing to prevent their starting except Jack, who refused to be left, and, thinking a walk was in prospect, kept running round them and barking.

"I know!" cried Bob, struck by a bright idea. "Take your prayer-book, and then he'll think we're going to church."

But Molly smiled contemptuously, and said,—

"Jack's not quite a fool ; he knows that I wouldn't go to church with a handkerchief round my head. Besides, I've never been in the evening, so he won't know there is such a thing. No, I'll shove him in, and you shut the door quick, Bob. I can't bear to look at him—he looks at me so reproachfully."

With some difficulty the nursery door was shut on poor Jack, and the two children stole quietly downstairs. The hall was empty, although from the dining-room came sounds of some one laying the table. In a moment they had darted across, down the long conservatory, and out at the front door. Some snow still lay lightly on the ground, in a thin, white coating, which made it easy to see the way.

"We'll go first to that corner house in the

village where we don't know the people," said Molly, as they set off at a run. "But what shall we do if any one speaks to us?"

"Speak French, of course," he said, with authority. "I don't suppose any one about here will be able to question us very much if we talk quickly, and pretend not to understand any English."

"I hope they won't notice if I make mistakes. You know I do sometimes," said Molly doubtfully.

"Well, don't you talk at all; leave it all to me.

Bob spoke confidently, and Molly, quite reassured, began to think she could act her part successfully.

When they reached the cottage where they were to make their first attempt, Bob swung open the gate boldly, and marched up the garden to the door, where he struck up a tune on his concertina, singing away at the pitch of his voice.

At first Molly felt almost afraid to join in; it seemed so strange standing out there in the snow and the darkness, with the lights



*"Bob struck up a tune on his concertina, singing away
at the pitch of his voice."*

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of the cottage shining through the drawn curtains; but by the time Bob reached the second verse she was singing away gaily.

Presently a blind was drawn up, and a girl's face peeped out at them. Then, when the song was over, the door opened, and she came out on to the steps and dropped some coppers into Bob's outstretched hand.

"How much is it?" Molly whispered eagerly, as they turned away.

"Three pennies," answered Bob, handing them to her. "And now come on and let's try some other cottages; and mind you join in at once, and don't leave me shouting all alone."

So down the village they went, singing at the doors, and growing bolder every moment as they found how very few people even took the trouble to glance at them.

At several houses they had pennies and halfpennies thrown to them, while at others no notice at all was taken of them.

"Isn't there anybody richer we could go to?" asked Bob presently, as they stopped, uncertain where to proceed next—"some

one we don't know, and who might give us a sixpence? We shall have to be going in soon, or we shall be missed."

Molly pondered deeply for a minute, then she looked up.

"I know! There's a gentleman who came here lately, and I've never seen him. He lodges in that cottage over there, and goes to have lessons at the Rectory."

"But if he has lessons he can only be a boy," objected Bob.

Molly shook her head.

"I know he's quite grown up. I heard father speak of him, and say his name was Curtis."

So they started for the cottage which Molly had pointed out, and at the gate they set up their song again.

In a few minutes the door opened and a man looked out. He was young, with a pleasant, smiling face, and he glanced at the two children with some interest. When they had finished singing he spoke to them.

"Come in, you poor little things!" he said.
"You can wait by the fire till I find some-

thing to give you. You must be frozen out there;" and he took Bob kindly by the shoulder and pushed him into a room close to the door.

Such a cosy, bright room it was, too, with a big fire, and tea set out on the table. Molly, who had entered most reluctantly, shivered as she looked at it, and suddenly realized how cold she had got standing about in the snow.

All the same, though the warmth was pleasant, it was terrible being brought in like this. It was all very well out in the dark, but here, in the bright room, she felt suddenly desperately ashamed of her shabby clothes, and shrank shyly behind Bob.

"Have you come far, my boy, and where are you going to?" inquired the young man, as he rummaged in a drawer, apparently in search of some money.

Bob poured out a voluble answer in French, but his questioner soon stopped him.

"Don't jabber so fast," he cried; "I can't understand a word you say. You want to go back to your own country, is that it?"

Bob glanced round despairingly ; but having once begun to play a part, he could see no way out of it, so he nodded, and added that they had not come far that evening.

"Poor children, I wonder if you have the least idea how far you are from your own country ? Have you anywhere to go to to-night ?" their new friend asked. Then looking at Molly, he added pityingly, "Your poor little sister looks so cold, and it is a dreadful night for you to be out."

But on that point Bob had no hesitation, and assured him they had a shelter for that night ; and seeing they were in a hurry to be off, the young man opened the door to let them out.

"Well, good-night, my boy ; here is something to help you," he said, as he dropped a silver coin into Bob's hand ; "and your sister must have a piece of cake to eat on your way," as he cut a big hunch off the cake on the tea table, which he gave to Molly.

After thanking him warmly, the two children made their way again into the road and started off homewards.

"O Bob!" whispered Molly, as soon as they were out of earshot, "that was dreadful! I did feel so miserable the whole time."

"So did I," agreed Bob; "but all the same we were very lucky, for I do believe that it is a half-crown that he has given us. We have really made quite a lot of money; but I do wish I hadn't told so many stories. I feel so uncomfortable inside when I think about them."

"I felt a perfect humbug," answered Molly dismally, "even though it was all quite true about Jules. Still, it seemed so dreadfully like cheating to pretend it was us. Do you think it was wrong?"

"I hope not. I don't think it could be—very," said Bob. "You see we only wanted to get the money to help Jules—not for ourselves. I don't think we need tell how we got it, need we, Molly? I have an idea, somehow, that we should get so laughed at."

"I would much rather be scolded. I hate feeling I've done anything silly," Molly exclaimed decidedly. "But I had a dreadful idea just now: just suppose that some one

has found the door unfastened, and has locked it! We should have to ring, and then every one in the house would be sure to hear all about it."

Full of this new fear the children hurried on, and arrived panting and breathless at the front entrance.

Bob softly turned the handle of the door, and to their intense relief it opened easily, and they crept in, closing it quietly after them.

On their way upstairs, too, they met no one; but as they neared the nursery a soft whining fell upon their ears, rising to a low howl of distress, then sinking again to a gentle whimper.

"It's poor Jack, I'm sure," whispered Molly, as they went into the room.

And Jack it was, seated in the middle of the room with ears drooping dejectedly, and his head thrown back, preparatory to giving vent to another howl, which, at the sight of his little mistress, changed into a joyous bark of welcome.

Molly silenced him as quickly as she could,

for fear the noise should bring some one upstairs to see what was the matter, and she and Bob hurried into their own clothes as fast as they were able.

So when Nannie came into the nursery a little later she found them both sitting warming themselves by the fire.

"Why, Miss Molly," she said, "wherever have you been? I came up here because I heard Jack howling, and he seemed so miserable, and quite refused to come downstairs with me. I suppose you were playing about the house somewhere, and I really wonder you did not fetch him."

"We never heard him," answered Molly, getting very red.

"Well, you must have known how unhappy he would be, and I think it was very unkind of you to leave him shut up like that."

Nannie's tone was unusually sharp, for she was devoted to Jack, and Molly looked ready to cry.

"Has auntie come in yet?" Bob put in hastily, being most anxious to change the subject.

"Yes, Master Bob," answered Nannie; "and as she has been out all day, and scarcely seen you, you are to go down to dessert, though dinner is later than usual, and it is almost your bedtime now."

When the children entered the dining-room a little later father was talking so earnestly that he never heard the door open.

"I was vexed," he was just saying, "to find it was not true. I do hate being taken in like that."

"What are you vexed about, father?" inquired Molly, as she came to his side.

"You there, monkey? I never heard you. I am just telling mother that some one has been and humbugged your silly old father again."

"You are not silly," said Molly, as she held out her plate for some raisins. "But do tell us who has been trying to humbug you."

Father shook his head sadly.

"An old soldier, as usual," he said—"or rather, I should say, a man who called himself an old soldier. He came to me with a pitiable story, and told me he had served

with my old regiment. Of course I helped him; and now, after making inquiries, I find that he has never been in the army at all."

"But, father dear," said Molly doubtfully, "if the poor man really was very hungry, you would have helped him in any case, even if he wasn't an old soldier."

Father laughed and said,—

"That's just what annoys me so much. Of course I should have given him help; the poor wretch was starving. I suppose some one told him I had a soft corner in my heart for all old soldiers. It seems so mean to take advantage of that to gain money under false pretences."

"I don't think that I quite understand what 'false pertences' mean," said Molly.

"*Pretences*, Molly," corrected her father. "Now, how can I explain it to you? Well, suppose that you wanted some money very badly, if you told me what you wanted it for I should probably give it to you. But if you pretended to be starving, to make me pity you, that would be 'false pretences.'"

While father had been speaking Molly had

grown more and more red and uncomfortable, and her raisins lay untasted on her plate. She glanced across the table at Bob; but he looked quite happy and contented, and was chattering and laughing with auntie, while he ate some French plums with great relish.

The tears rushed to Molly's eyes. She felt miserable, and longed to tell her father of that evening's escapade. But without Bob's leave, to speak would be to break her promise to him; and if she asked him to allow her to do so, he would be sure to tell her she never could keep a secret!

"What is the matter, Molly?" father asked presently. "You have not eaten any of your raisins. Do you not feel well, dear?"

"I think I am rather tired," answered Molly; but her voice sounded so very tearful that mother's attention was called to her.

"You had better run away to bed, both of you, at once," she said. "I hope you are not going to have a cold, Molly dear."

Molly declared that she did not feel at all like having a cold, but only wanted to go to bed,

and she said her "good-nights" with unusual haste.

"What was it?" inquired Bob, as they went upstairs. "Did you eat all that slice of cake, and was that why you couldn't manage your raisins?"

His cousin turned a most offended look upon him.

"I never ate a crumb of it," she cried. "I kept it all for dear Jack, to make up to him for being shut in; but he would not touch it. Good-night, Bob—and oh! I am so miserable. Father was saying such dreadful things about 'false pertences.'"

And as she ran off to bed Bob heard something which sounded very like a sob.





CHAPTER X

A NEW FRIEND.

"**B**OB, *do* wake up—please do!" Bob opened his eyes sleepily, but finding the room still in darkness, he closed them again and rolled over.

"I'm sure it's not time to get up yet," he murmured drowsily.

Molly seized him by the shoulders and shook him vigorously.

"Bob!" she cried, "you *must* wake and speak to me for one minute, I am so very miserable."

"What's the matter?" asked Bob, as he sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"I am so unhappy about the half-crown, and I am afraid father would say I was mean, like the old soldier and the 'false pretences,'" sobbed Molly confusedly. "Do let me go and tell him all about it."

"I felt as if I had been naughty too; but then I dropped off to sleep," answered Bob. "Poor Molly, have you been awake long?"

"Ages," she replied; "and I heard father go to his dressing-room, so I came to wake you and ask if I might tell him."

"Of course you may; and I'll come too, and tell him it was most my fault," and Bob scrambled out of bed. "Why, you haven't even got your dressing-gown on! Aren't you cold?" he asked, as he took his cousin's hand.

"Not very," she answered, though her teeth were chattering. "But, Bob, you won't say I can never keep a secret, will you?"

"Of course not, dear; I want to tell uncle myself," said Bob valiantly.

So they stole quietly along the dimly-lighted passage to the dressing-room, and in

answer to their tap the door was opened by father, who gazed in astonishment at the two little barefooted, white-robed figures outside.

"Whatever are you two doing out of bed at this time of night?" he said. "Why, Molly, you are positively shivering with cold;" and lifting her in his arms he wrapped her warmly in his dressing-gown.

Then after being tucked up warm and cosy in a big arm-chair, Molly began,—

"Father, Bob and I have something to tell you; but will you promise us not to tell any one else, and not to scold us?"

Father looked doubtful, but Molly's voice was so anxiously imploring that he gave in.

"Very well, I promise," he said. "And really I am very curious to know what has induced you two to go wandering about at this time of night."

Then Molly told her story, helped out every now and then by Bob, beginning by their adventures of the evening, and winding up by an account of how very uncomfortable she had felt ever since father had spoken of the man who pretended to be an old soldier.

"I was so afraid you would say it was rather mean, father," she went on dejectedly. "Do you think it was getting money on false pretences?"

"Yes, Molly, I am afraid it was," answered father. "You see you were only shamming to be poor children."

"But it was all quite true what I told about Jules," put in Bob. "The man gave us the half-crown for a poor little French boy."

"But you led him to suppose that you were the poor boy yourself," said father. "And you see he thought Molly was your sister; and perhaps he is fond of little girls, and that was why he gave you so much."

The children were silent for some minutes, thinking over what father had said. Then Molly looked up resolutely.

"I think we will take it back, and explain all about Jules, and say we are sorry for having pretended to be poor, when we aren't really," she said.

Father looked quite pleased.

"I think that would be a good plan, Molly," he said; "for, you see, if Mr. Curtis

came here to see me, and recognized you, you would be obliged to explain all about it then."

"Do you know him, uncle?" Bob exclaimed, in a horrified voice.

But Molly sprang up, and winding her arms round father's neck, laid her cheek coaxingly against his.

"Father," she said, "if you know him, could you not write and explain for us?"

But father shook his head very decidedly.

"No," he said; "if you get into such mischief, you certainly must learn to pull yourselves out of your own scrapes."

"The pennies don't matter, do they?" suddenly exclaimed Bob; "we did not pretend at all to get them."

"No," answered his uncle, smiling; "the people who gave those to you must have done so because they had the bad taste to like your singing. But remember, children, you must not go playing such tricks again; for although I promised not to scold you, still you must know how naughty it was to go out alone after dark like that, and without telling any one."

Molly looked up, blinking sleepily.

"We promise not to do it again," she said gently; but added, with a little mischievous chuckle at the recollection, "It was fun, too; and no one would ever have found it out unless we had told you ourselves."

Father did not answer, but he picked up his little girl in his arms and carried her off to bed, turning his head away to hide the smile which he could not quite suppress.

The next day was Sunday, and in the afternoon the two children set out for a walk with Nannie. Father nearly always took them out on Sundays, but to-day he had gone out with mother; so, much to their disappointment, Molly and Bob were obliged to put up with the company of Nannie. Not but what they were very fond of going out with her; still it made it seem more like an every-day walk, instead of a Sunday treat.

"We want to go towards the village," said Molly, as they were starting; "we are going to call on Mr. Curtis, who is in lodgings there."

"But have you got leave to go?" inquired

Nannie doubtfully, for she was well acquainted with Molly's powers of getting into mischief.

"Oh! it is all right," answered Molly reassuringly; "father knows all about it. And, Nannie, as it is very private business on which we want to see Mr. Curtis, would you mind walking on a little and waiting for us?"

Nannie assented, wondering to herself what the children could possibly have to say to Mr. Curtis, of whose existence she had never even heard before. Whatever it was, it had evidently a depressing effect on the spirits of her young charges, who walked along soberly by her side, a very solemn expression on their faces.

Arrived at the cottage, Bob marched up the path and rang the bell, Molly following him unwillingly.

"How I do wish it were over," he sighed; "I do feel so horrid."

Just then the door was opened by an elderly woman.

"We want to see Mr. Curtis, please," said Bob.

"Step inside, sir," answered the woman;

and she opened the door of the sitting-room and ushered them in. "A young lady and gentleman to see you, sir," she announced.

Mr. Curtis started up and gazed at his visitors in astonishment. Then a light of recognition broke over his face; but he seemed too much overcome by surprise at the sight of the two children to speak. Only last night he had pitied them for being cold and hungry; and now here they were back again, prettily and warmly dressed, and with that indescribable look of being well cared for which Nannie always gave them.

Molly advanced into the room first, and plunged boldly into her subject.

"We have brought back your half-crown," she said, growing very red as she spoke, "because we were only pretending to be very poor ourselves, though it was quite true all about the little French boy, and we did really want the money dreadfully badly for him. But we asked father about it, and he thought it was getting it on false pretences—no, *pretences*, I mean—so we have brought it back to you."

Molly paused to recover her breath, and glanced across at Mr. Curtis to see if he looked very angry. But while she had been speaking, the young man's look of astonishment had changed into one of amusement, and now he burst into a peal of laughter.

"Well, you are a couple of young imps," he said; "but, upon my word, I would give something to be able to jabber French like you and your brother."

"We have both been in France," said Bob, "and I live there. Molly is my cousin. I did not say she was my sister, you know. You thought so, and I didn't contradict you."

"Well, you are a nice pair of humbugs," exclaimed their host; but he looked so much amused that Molly, who was watching him, felt quite relieved.

"It is very good of you not to be angry," she said; "and really, you know, we did take you in well!" and her eyes sparkled at the recollection.

"That you did! You took me in most thoroughly," the young man answered good-humouredly. "Now, won't you both come and

sit down, and tell me whom you wanted to get money for, and why, when you had once got it, you brought it back again? I am quite curious to hear all about this little French boy, who, you say, really does exist somewhere."

Molly came forward with the greatest friendliness, and seating herself comfortably in a chair by the fire, she told the story of Jules from their first meeting with him.

"And now mother has got an answer from his uncle, who is the *curé* of his native village. The nearest way to get to it is by Marseilles. The *curé* says he is a very good little boy, and most deserving. But the uncle says he was always against their coming to England; and if Jules goes back to him, he will start him at a trade. It seems so funny for a relation of this poor little boy to be a clergyman; but mother says that in French villages they are sometimes quite common people, and very poor." Then Molly added in conclusion, "So, you see, we really do want the money very badly to send poor Jules back to his home, and we thought,

perhaps, if you feel sorry for him, that you won't want the half-crown again after all."

"I will tell you what I will do," said Mr. Curtis—"you shall keep the half-crown, and I will give you another to add to it."

"O you dear!" cried Molly impulsively.

Bob glanced at her reprovingly.

"Thank you, very much," he said, with grave propriety. "I am so glad we offered to return it, because we did feel so uncomfortable about keeping it. Now, Molly, I think we must be going."

"Won't you stay a little longer and have tea with me?" asked Mr. Curtis.

Bob shook his head resolutely.

"No, thank you," he said; "our nurse is waiting outside, and so is Jack—that's Molly's dog—so we really must not keep them any longer."

The children bade their new friend a warm good-bye, and ran out to rejoin Nannie and Jack.

As they got near home they were met by father.

"Well, children, have you had a nice

walk? I have left mother to have tea with such a party of old ladies that I felt too shy to stay with her, so I came to see if you would invite me to nursery tea."

"Oh, how nice, father dear!" cried Molly. "Do please stoop down and let me whisper something to you;" and standing on tip-toe she murmured softly in his ear, "Won't you tell Nannie that you like strawberry jam?"

"Nannie," he said, turning to her and laughing, "I am coming to tea in the nursery, so will you go on and get it ready, and please see that there is plenty of strawberry jam."

Then when he was left alone with the two children he inquired,—

"Have you decided anything about that half-crown yet?"

"We have just taken it back," answered Bob, in a tone of immense relief.

"Well, you have certainly not lost any time," said father, and he looked very pleased.

"It was dreadful at first," said Molly; "afterwards Mr. Curtis was so kind. He is

a perfect dear ! I was frightened though when I walked in and began to tell him ; but I thought of the old soldier, and I got it over as quickly as I could."

"That was my plucky little girl and brave little boy !" said father approvingly to the two children. And Molly was quite satisfied.





CHAPTER XI

BACK TO LEE.

WELL, children, do you know that your friend, Mr. Curtis, is coming to luncheon to-day?" asked father.

It was breakfast-time, and mother, who was reading her letters, looked up in surprise.

"They don't know Mr. Curtis," she said. "I have not seen him yet myself."

"Well, Molly informed me that he was a 'perfect dear,'" answered father, laughing, "so they must have met somewhere."

Both children grew rather red, but as mother had just opened a very interesting letter, she forgot to ask any more questions.

When luncheon-time came, Molly and Bob were unusually silent; they were desperately afraid that Mr. Curtis would mention their former meetings with him. Much to their

relief, however, he never referred to the subject, and they very soon forgot their anxiety.

"Would you care to look at father's Toby jug?" asked Molly, as they rose from table. "It is such a beauty, and it was a present from us."

Mr. Curtis declared that he should very much like to see it, and when Molly showed it to him he was perfectly delighted with it.

"What a jolly old Toby!" he said; "wherever did you get it?"

"We went all the way to Lee market, all by ourselves, to buy it, and on the way home we got lost on the moors," answered Molly proudly.

"I really think I must go there some day and try to get a Toby jug for myself," said Mr. Curtis; "but when I go I shall stick to the highroad, and not risk spending a night on the moors, or any such adventure. Now I do wish you would show me your little dog. I have been admiring him all luncheon-time, but he quite refused to come near me."

"Jack will never take any notice of a stranger till he has been properly introduced,"

said Molly, as she held him up to be admired.

"I expect Mr. Curtis would like to look at your bantams, Molly," suggested Bob.

The young man assured them that he should enjoy it immensely; and the children carried him off in triumph to see their pets, mother calling after them that they were not to tease Mr. Curtis too much.

"Are they not beauties?" said Molly, as she exhibited her bantams; "they lay such delicious eggs. And Juliet, that little brown one over there, laid one in the curtains of Bob's room when he came here to stay. Wasn't it nice of her to welcome him like that?"

"Most considerate of her," answered Mr. Curtis. "But do you ever sell your eggs? Or what do you do with them?"

"We eat them for breakfast, and sometimes for tea," said Bob. "You see there are only a few hens. Did you want to buy some?"

"I only thought that as you seemed extremely anxious to make as much money as

you can for Jules, you might like to sell some," answered Mr. Curtis. "I have got my mother coming to pay me a visit to-morrow, and she is particularly fond of a fresh egg every morning for breakfast; but unless she is certain they are absolutely new laid, she won't touch them. So I wondered if, for the next week, you would send me some of yours every day?"

"How kind of you to think of such a lovely plan for us!" exclaimed Molly gratefully. "We will send the eggs up every morning; I am sure the garden boy will take them. And oh! I do hope your mother will pay you a nice long visit."

So the bargain was struck, and after that Molly and Bob ate their breakfast and tea without the nice little brown eggs of which they were so fond.

It really did require a certain amount of self-denial to send all their dear little eggs away. Still it was quite a delightful feeling to know that each time they went without them it was adding a few pennies towards the sum required for sending Jules home.

Some days later mother entered the nursery with an open note in her hand.

"Children," she said, "I have just accepted an invitation for you. Mr. Curtis is going to drive over to Lee this afternoon to try to get a Toby jug like father's, and he has asked you to go with him. He will call here for you at two o'clock."

"What fun!" cried Bob; "and how nice of him to take us!"

But Molly did not look quite so pleased.

"Are you quite sure it isn't at all dangerous?" she asked. "I don't want to get lost again."

"You may be quite certain that I should not let you go if there were the least chance of such a thing," mother answered. "But Mr. Curtis will drive you round by the carriage road, which is much further than the short cut across the moor; so you must be quite ready when he calls for you, in order to have plenty of time before it gets dark."

When Mr. Curtis arrived at two o'clock he found the two children at the front door waiting for him.

"I am glad to see you are ready," he said; "my pony does not like standing. Now you had better jump in at once. I thought you would rather both sit on the front seat with me, so I did not have the back one put in. And Jack is there too, I see; is he going to run behind?"

"No, Jack will sit on my knee," answered Molly firmly; "he never walks unless I do too;" and she clambered in, Jack in her arms, and seated herself between Mr. Curtis and Bob.

Then they were off, spinning along gaily behind the quick-trotting little pony.

"How is Jules to-day?" inquired Mr. Curtis presently.

"He is getting well so dreadfully quick," answered Bob. "Of course we are pleased at his being better, but we did so want to have time to collect the money to send him home before he was strong enough to travel."

"How much have you got?" asked Mr. Curtis.

"About eighteen shillings," Bob answered. "So, you see, it would need a little more than two pounds still to make up the whole."

"But I am sure that your father and mother will help you," said Mr. Curtis.

"Of course, we know they would," answered Molly, "but that would not be quite the same thing. We wanted to get it all for ourselves without asking grown-up people to help us. Oh how lovely it is up here on the moors!" she added suddenly. "Just look how the hills are smiling to-day!"

They were driving along the winding road which led round the foot of the hills to Lee. The last traces of snow had disappeared from it, though on the higher ground it still lay white and sparkling against a sky of brilliant blue—that intense, deep blue which one only sees on a very frosty day and in a mountainous country.

All nature seemed to be rejoicing, and as they drove along the children chattered and laughed with excitement.

They described their thrilling adventures when they were lost on the moors, and pointed out the short cut they had taken, which could be faintly seen on the distant hillside.

Arrived at Lee, they drove straight to the market-place.

"If you go slowly past the stalls, I will tell you when we get to our woman," said Bob. "Oh! there she is—the one with the red apron on."

Mr. Curtis drew up

"I want to know if you have any Toby jugs for sale," he asked.

"Yes, sir, I have several," she answered, and she brought two or three and set them on the front of the stall for him to look at.

But not one of them was half so nice as the Green Dwarf. They looked commoner somehow; and although they all wore broad grins on their faces, their expressions were really not half so comical.

"You sold this young lady and gentleman such a pretty green-and-white one some little time ago," said Mr. Curtis. "Do you remember it; and, if so, have you got another like it?"

The woman glanced up at the two children.

"Why, of course I remember you now!"

she exclaimed; "and I can call the Toby jug to mind, too, for I had only bought it myself two days before. No, sir, you won't get another like that, for it was an old one, and these are all fresh from the potteries."

"Oh, do tell us where ours came from," cried Bob eagerly; "we have so often wished to know."

"I can easily tell you that," she answered, "for I knew the old woman it used to belong to. She was very poor, and never had any relations that I heard tell on; so when she died, her bit sticks were sold to pay the little money she owed, and for sure and certain they more than did that; and I bought the Toby jug."

"Did you know that the top was stuck and would not come off?" inquired Molly.

"I think it must have been like that for years; I never saw it off," she replied. "I hope you weren't wanting to use it as a mug, missy. I thought that a young lady like you would be more wishing it for an ornament."

"Oh! it wasn't that," answered Molly. "Only there is something in it that rattles

about; so we thought that perhaps some day the lid might come off, and we might find treasure inside, and we wondered if it would belong to us."

The woman burst out laughing, and said,—

"Whatever you find in that old jug you keep it for yourself, missy; but I expect you won't get much out of it—nothing more than some ha'pence at most."

Then Mr. Curtis, who had at length selected a Toby for himself, suggested that they should be moving.

- "What do you say to going to eat some buns at your friend the confectioner's?" he inquired.

The children were delighted at the idea, and a few minutes later they entered the shop. The owner recognized Molly and Jack at once.

"I am very pleased to see you back again, miss," she said. "I have often wondered how you found your way home that evening you were here. And how is your little dog? Has he come to eat some more of my stale biscuits?"

"Thank you, very much," Molly answered; "but we have all come to eat some of your nice hot buns, and Jack may have one also, may he not, Mr. Curtis?"

Of course Mr. Curtis consented; and when the buns were brought, the little party sat down to enjoy them, talking and laughing merrily the while. Then the friendly shopwoman insisted on giving Jack a saucerful of milk to drink, which Mr. Curtis thought so kind of her that he immediately ordered a large bag of cakes, which he gave to the children to put in the cart.

When they were started again, with the pony trotting quickly through the gathering twilight on their way home, Molly gave a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"I have enjoyed myself," she said; "and I am so pleased that we really know where the green Toby jug came from."

"Yes," agreed Bob; "and if the lid did come off, and we found something very nice inside, it would be so much happier to feel that we really might keep it for ourselves."

"I think I like it better as it is, though,"

reflected Molly. "It seems as if it must be a sort of fairy; and once we know all about what is inside, it would be just like any other Toby jug."

By the time they arrived at home it was almost dark, and they found father waiting at the door to receive them.

"We have enjoyed ourselves so much," cried Molly; and when they got into the hall, and their kind young friend had driven off, she added, "I am so glad we went and sang to Mr. Curtis that night, or we might never have known him, and he is a perfect dear."

"And, uncle," said Bob, "the woman from whom we bought the Toby jug says that whatever we find inside it we may keep for ourselves."

"I may keep, you mean," said father; "you see the Toby jug belongs to me now."

"Oh! I had quite forgotten that!" exclaimed Molly, in a disappointed voice.

However, father consoled her by saying,—

"I promise you that if ever anything is found inside the green Toby, you shall have it for your own."



CHAPTER XII

A HAPPY ENDING.

JULES was better—so much better that he had been allowed to come to the nursery for tea. Now, tea over, he sat in an arm-chair by the fire, with Molly and Bob and Jack grouped round him. The Toby jug was there too; Molly had brought it in and set it on a chair opposite to Jules.

But of this arrangement Jack highly disapproved, for he particularly wished to be on that seat himself. Several times he had almost succeeded in shoving the Toby jug off; but at last his little mistress had spoken

so sharply to him that he now lay stretched demurely on the rug. But being a dog with great determination of character, he still kept one eye fixed on the offending Toby, and bided his time.

"You see, Jules," Molly was saying, "you are so much stronger now, that the doctor says the sooner you get back to your own warm country the better."

"Yes, mam'selle," answered Jules, in a tone of deep interest.

"Well," went on Molly, "we asked father how much it would take to buy a ticket to send you all the way, and he said two pounds, nineteen shillings, and threepence. But although we have tried our very best to make money, we have only just managed to get the nineteen shillings and threepence. Haven't we worked hard to get that, Bob?"

Bob nodded, and said,—

"I should think we just have. We told you about the currants, Jules, and bantams' eggs, and lots of things."

"But it is more than good of you both," cried Jules; "and with the money you have

for me I shall be able to get a long way towards my home."

"Oh, father and mother are sure to give you the rest," answered Molly; "but we did so want to get it all ourselves, because, you see, it was we who first found you. However, we have only managed nineteen shillings and threepence, so here it is."

Molly poured their little pile of money out on to the table, and Jules was just trying to express his gratitude, when they were all startled by a sudden crash.

It was Jack, who, finding that no one was paying any attention to him, had made a sudden bound up on to the chair, knocking off the Toby jug, and settling himself in its place.

"O Jack, you naughty dog!" cried Bob, "I do believe you have broken the green Toby—yes! here is his poor hat."

Molly was almost in tears, but suddenly she sprang up with a shout.

"Look, Bob!" she cried, "here are two gold pounds that have rolled out of his inside; and he's not broken, it is only his lid knocked off. Oh! joy, joy," she called out,

and danced round with excitement at her discovery.

Just then the nursery door opened.

"What is all the noise about?" asked father as he came in. "Mother and I have come up to see if anything is the matter."

"It's the green Toby jug!" cried Molly. "Jack tumbled it from the chair and knocked the lid off, and just see what has rolled out of it!"

"How very, very strange!" cried mother—"just like fairies, Molly."

"How very extraordinary," said father, "for all that money to be hidden in the Toby."

"Well I never!" added Nannie, who had also arrived on the scene.

"Anyhow, children, it all belongs to you," said father; "I said you should have whatever was found in my precious Toby jug."

"It will just do to send Jules home with," cried both triumphantly.

"I hope it is quite good money," said Bob. "Look, auntie, it certainly has not got the Queen's head on it," as he handed her one of the coins.

"No; it is the head of George the Third," exclaimed mother. "I do wonder how long it has been in that old jug. It is quite good, though, Bob. I am glad it has happened like this, as I know how pleased you will both be now that the sending Jules home will be entirely your own doing. It is certainly very strange."

"Mother," said Molly, very solemnly, "I always felt the Green Dwarf was a fairy; now I am sure of it. But I can't help almost wishing he had stayed as he was; for now he will be nothing but just a common Toby jug, and the fairy part of him will have left us and gone back again to Fairy-land."

"Molly dear," said mother gently, "don't you think that there are other sorts of fairies quite as wonderful as the green Toby? Think of your own story—how the Queen of the Fairies hated all unkindness and selfishness. Don't you think that, by keeping her laws of lovingkindness and gentleness to others, you may be a sort of fairy in your own home yourself?"

Molly looked up in surprise.

"I never could be a fairy!" she said.

Father stooped down and lifted his little daughter in his arms.

"You are all the fairy I want, and a very good one too," he remarked, as he kissed her.

And Molly was more than content.

And so ends the story of the Green Toby Jug. Of those concerned in it, Jules was sent home in a short time, and grew strong and well again, and never forgot his kind friends in England. Molly and Bob, in whom I hope you have become a little interested, are, or rather were, real children, for both are now grown up. Bob is not much changed. His cheeks are no longer so round and red; but he is still very good at remembering to be polite, as his little cousin used to say.

Molly is grown up too; but Nannie is still with her, and still pets or scolds her as she sees fit.

And Jack is dead—dear Jack, Molly's

faithful companion for fifteen happy, happy years. Dead, but not forgotten, for Molly always declares that no other dog will ever quite take the place of her old friend.

And the old home is home no longer. Still, if some day you meet Molly, and ask her if all the changes have made her unhappy, I think she will tell you that whatever troubles or sorrows may come—and even into the happiest life some sorrow must come—yet nothing can ever take away the sweet memory of a loving and happy childhood. And I think that she would tell you also to remember, if ever you are tempted to think home dull, or the people in it not quite all you would wish, that some day, perhaps, it may be your greatest joy to look back and recollect that, by having been bright and loving and unselfish, you helped in some degree to make home happy, and to be father's or mother's "Fairy."

*The Princess who Lived
Opposite*





THE PRINCESS WHO LIVED ~ OPPOSITE

CHAPTER I

THE PRINCESS ARRIVES.

IT was a dull, rainy afternoon. At the nursery window of a high, rather gloomy-looking London house stood a little boy, peering out into the fog and rain.

The nursery was gloomy too—comfortable enough, perhaps, but still not in the least like one's idea of what a nursery ought to be. No bright pictures hung on the walls, and the paper itself looked as if it had been chosen more for the sake of usefulness than for beauty. Altogether, it was a room which made one feel that it had been intended

for something else, and had only been put to its present use "under protest," so to speak.

But the little boy at the window was not thinking of the room in which he stood. His whole attention was fixed, not on the wet, deserted street, in which the lamps were just being lighted, nor on the dull nursery, but upon the house opposite.

And the house opposite was a decidedly cheering object to look at on this dull afternoon. For one thing, it was painted white—a beautiful, clean, new, "unsmoky" white—from top to bottom, except the window sashes and door, which were a very bright blue. Then in every window there was a blue flower-box, full of all sorts of little green bushes, which did not seem to mind the wintry weather.

"I wish the painters had not quite finished," said the little boy to himself; "I like watching them. But now that it is all ready, I do wonder what will happen next. I am sure that the old lady can't have had it all done just for herself. It looks exactly as if it had been prepared for a visitor. It might

be—yes! I really think it must be got ready for a real live princess.”

But at this point his thoughts were interrupted by the sound of nurse’s voice.

“Master Alister,” it said, “wake up, and don’t stand gazing out of that window. I wonder you don’t find your story books more amusing than standing there in the cold. But now you must come and have your tea.”

Alister turned from the window obediently and advanced into the room. He was a sturdy, rosy-cheeked, dark-haired little boy; but just now his usually smiling face looked rather woe-begone.

“I’ve read all my story books so often that I’m tired of them,” he said; “and a holiday does seem so long when I can’t go out, that I think I would almost rather have lessons to do. If only I might go to school while father is away in India, then I should have some one to play with.”

“I am afraid that you are a very ungrateful little boy, Master Alister,” said nurse reprovingly, “to wish to leave your uncle,

when he is kind enough to have you to stay with him for the time your father is away."

"I didn't mean to go right away to school though," exclaimed Alister. "I only meant I wished I could go to one every day, like the little boys next door; and I'm sure that couldn't make any difference to Uncle Gerald, because I scarcely ever see him except in the evening, he always seems so dreadfully busy."

"So he is; but that is because he is so very clever, you see," replied nurse. "You will have to work very hard indeed, Master Alister, or you will never be so clever as your uncle when you are grown up."

"I don't think I want to be, not if it means always living in London, and having nothing but dirty, dull streets to look at."

Nurse smiled.

"I am sure you cannot have been looking out of the window this afternoon," she said, "to see the arrival at the house opposite, or you would not call the street dull. Such a fuss I never saw!"

"An arrival to stay with the old lady in the white house!" cried Alister eagerly. "O



THE ARRIVAL

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**ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.**

nurse, do tell me what they were like! And do you think they have come for long?"

"For a year, I should think, to judge by the pile of luggage," said nurse. "In my young days children were not allowed so many things to cart about with them."

"Children!" cried Alister; "did you say it was children?"

"It was a child, a little girl," replied nurse; "and a nurse with her, besides a dog and several bird-cages, and enough luggage for ten grown people, let alone one child."

"Go on, nurse; what was the dog like?" persisted Alister.

"A little, roundabout, yellowish thing," answered nurse, "with very long hair, which must be one person's work to keep clean in wet weather, I should think. There was the old lady out in the street with her cap on, hugging and kissing the child, and the dog dancing round and barking like a lunatic. But you will probably see them for yourself before long, Master Alister."

The little boy was so much excited at this prospect that he could scarcely manage to take

his tea, and the moment he had finished he rushed back to the window.

In the drawing-room of the house opposite the lamps were lighted, but the blinds were not yet drawn, and at one of the windows stood a little girl.

Such a pretty little girl too!—very tiny and slender, with a laughing, mischievous face and a cloud of fluffy, golden hair. She was dressed all in white—a mass of soft lace and ribbons, and her short skirt seemed to stand out round her in a sort of “bunchy” frill.

Close beside her sat a little dog, whose toilet, to judge from his appearance, must have been quite as carefully attended to as that of his little mistress, for his tawny curls were carefully brushed, and parted with the utmost care from the crown of his head right down his back. His white breast, too, was spotlessly clean; while from under his long, wavy hair gleamed his ‘large, bright, dark eyes.

Alister stood gazing down at them in delighted admiration; and as he watched, the

little girl suddenly looked up, and catching sight of his eager face at the window, gave him a half-shy, half-mischievous smile. But at that moment some one came behind her and drew down the blind, shutting out the scene from the little watcher's sight.

"She is perfectly beautiful," he said to himself, "and, I am sure, she does look exactly like a princess. I shall call her the Princess—to myself, at anyrate—for the name just suits her. What a dear dog, too! Oh dear! I do hope they will stay a long time; then I can watch them every day."

Most little boys in his place would have wished to get to know the new arrival at the house opposite, so that they might play together; but Alister was quite satisfied to admire from a distance. He was a shy child really, and till quite lately he had lived entirely alone with his father in their far-away home in Scotland; and now that his father had gone to India, and he had come to stay with his uncle in London, everything seemed strange and rather alarming.

Secretly, too, he was rather afraid of his

Uncle Gerald, who, although he meant to be kind, was certainly rather grave and stern.

His nurse also was almost a stranger to him ; for his own one had not been willing to come so far from home, so Uncle Gerald's housekeeper had undertaken the post for the time.

All that evening the little boy's fancy was busy with speculations about his "Princess," as he called her to himself, and his last thought as he fell asleep at night was that he should probably see her to-morrow.

The next day was Sunday, and in the morning Alister went to church, accompanied by nurse.

Not a sign of the Princess, however, was to be seen. Probably she was tired, and had slept late after her journey, the little boy told himself.

The weather had cleared, and was fine and bright after yesterday's rain. In the afternoon a message came up to the nursery from Uncle Gerald, to say that he was going for a walk, and would take his little nephew with him. This was a most unusual honour, and

Alister set out proud but shy, and painfully on his best behaviour.

It was very difficult to keep a conversation going with Uncle Gerald; he was so different from father, and always seemed to be making a great effort to appear interested, and wondering whatever he could say next to his little nephew.

They walked through the Park, and past the Serpentine, where Alister would like to have lingered to watch the toy ships being sailed about; but Uncle Gerald looked so disapproving that he did not like to suggest it.

"How dreadfully busy every one always seems to be in London, Uncle Gerald!" he remarked, as they turned homewards. "The people never seem to have time to talk to each other."

"Well, I suppose people up in the Highlands have more time on their hands," replied his uncle; "but still I should think that the ones you want to talk to—nurse and your governess, I mean—have plenty of time to spare."

"Oh! I wasn't thinking of them," said Alister, "but of outside people. There are the little boys who live next door; I tried to talk to them, but they wouldn't answer me at all. The crossing-sweeper in our street is really the most friendly person whom I have met."

"Alister, I am surprised at you," cried his uncle in a tone which quite made the little boy jump. "I should really have thought that you were old enough to know that you must not talk to strangers in the street."

"But at home we always stop and have a few words with every one," pleaded Alister; "they would be quite hurt if we did not."

"Well, you are in London now," replied Uncle Gerald sternly; "and in future you must remember that you are not to do so."

He seemed quite vexed, and, very much puzzled, Alister walked along beside him in subdued silence. But as they turned into their street he caught sight of something which drove the scolding he had received quite out of his head.

There, racing towards them, his silky curls

waving in the breeze, came the little dog from the house opposite, and after him in hot pursuit ran the Princess!

She looked more like a princess than ever to-day, in her little red velvet coat and cap; and as she noticed their approach, "Stop him!" she called out imperiously; "hold him for me!"

Uncle Gerald stooped down obediently, and caught hold of the wriggling, panting little dog.

"O Ruffie! you bad dog!" exclaimed his little mistress, as she came up. "He runned away 'cos he wouldn't have his muzzle on," she added; "so hold him tight till I get it fastened."

This accomplished, she released the impatient Ruffie, and turned to Uncle Gerald.

"Thank you," she said; "I'm 'stremely obliged to you;" and with a friendly smile and a parting nod she darted across the road to where her nurse stood waiting.

"What a dear little girl!" exclaimed Uncle Gerald, "and how pretty! I wonder who she is?"

"She is the Prin—I mean the little girl who has come to stay with the old lady in the house opposite," replied Alister; and to himself he added, "She certainly is a princess, or she would never dare to order Uncle Gerald about like that. And he didn't seem to mind about not knowing her either; he looked quite pleased. It is nice to be a princess!"





CHAPTER II

THE PRINCESS MAKES FRIENDS.

ALISTER had not long to wait before he saw his Princess again. The very next morning, as he opened the front door and stood on the step waiting till nurse was ready to start for a walk, there, at the house opposite, was a little black pony. At its head stood an elderly coachman, his own horse beside him. On the pony's back was seated the Princess; while the old lady of the house was out in the street watching the proceedings, with

Ruffie clasped tightly in her arms, despite his struggles to get down.

When Alister opened the door the Princess was speaking in her clear, childish voice.

"Take that leading-rein away," he could hear her saying. "You know I never have one; and you are to ride quite far behind me, 'cos I aren't a baby."

"But just through the streets, missy," urged the coachman. "If you let me lead you till we get to the Park, I will ride behind you then."

"Yes, dear," struck in the old lady persuasively, "that will be much safer. Just think, if you were to meet a motor car, or perhaps a lion or a tiger going to the Zoo, I am sure you would be frightened if you had no one beside you, and so would the pony."

"Perhaps he would be," agreed the Princess doubtfully; "so if you think he will be happier, you may put it on for a few minutes. Oh! look, Cousin Mary!" she added, as she caught sight of Alister, "there is the little boy opposite. Why does he wear petticoats?"

"Hush, dear, that's a kilt," replied the old lady, in an audible whisper.

"I like it," announced the Princess. "And he has got such nice brown knees;" and with a parting wave of the hand, she whipped up the pony and clattered off down the street, dragging the old coachman after her, while Ruffie cried and whimpered wildly to follow her, and Alister looked down with pride at the knees which had found favour in the eyes of his Princess.

After this scarcely a day passed that he did not see her once, if not more, and hear her too, for she generally seemed to be talking and laughing as she danced along by her nurse or ran races with her little dog.

To the lonely little boy opposite it seemed that no princess could ever have been merrier or more indulged than this one, and he often listened with longing ears to the sounds of laughter from the house opposite, wishing that he might join in the games which were evidently taking place in the nursery.

Christmas came at last. But what a different Christmas from those he had spent with father! For, after taking his little nephew to church and for a walk in the afternoon,

Uncle Gerald went off to see some friends, and Alister was left to the company of nurse, who was both sleepy and cross.

So the little boy crept to his favourite window, from which he could observe how the Princess was spending her Christmas. But when he saw the brightly-lighted Christmas tree in the nursery of the house opposite, and heard the little girl's merry laughter, a few tears of loneliness would come, hard though he tried to keep them back.

Next day, however, his troubles were forgotten, for his uncle sent up to say that he was to go that evening to a big children's party at a house near.

Alister had never been to such a thing, and he spent the whole day in a state of excited expectation; but by the time that he was dressed in his best kilt, with a black velvet coat and silver buttons, and, escorted by nurse, had reached the house, he was overcome by a sudden fit of shyness.

The room was crowded with children, who were nearly all dancing; and when Alister had spoken to the lady of the house, he crept

into a corner to look on. He would have liked to dance too, but all the children seemed to know each other, and he was far too shy to address any of them.

But just as he was beginning to feel rather lonely and dull, a voice at his side made him turn with a start.

"Are you enjoying yourself, little boy from opposite?" it inquired.

And there, sure enough, stood the Princess, her golden hair more curly, and her lace frock and blue sash more bunchy than ever.

"No; I don't know any of the other children, Princess," faltered Alister.

"What's that you called me?" she cried.

"It was only the name I gave you to myself," answered Alister, growing very red. "You see I don't know your real one, so I called you the Princess."

His companion clapped her hands delightedly.

"What a nice name!" she cried. "I won't tell you my real one, so you will have to go on calling me that. And if I am a princess, you will have to do every single thing I tells you. Will you, little boy?"

"I will be a most obedient subject, Princess," answered Alister, who had quite forgotten his shyness in talking to this friendly little stranger.

"That's just what I meant, only I couldn't remember the word," said the Princess. "I think I will sit down and talk to you, as you are my subject," she added, "'cos I aren't a bit amused here. I told Cousin Mary I would much rather stay at home with her and Ruffie. Poor Ruffie! He is my dog, you know; he will cry all the time I'm out. Nurse says he only whimpers, but I am sure I have seen real tears running down his face. Now tell me what's your name, and do you always live with the gentleman who caught Ruffie for me? Is he your father?"

And Alister was soon pouring out his whole history to his new friend—how father had gone away to India, and would not be back for a whole year, and how he had come to live with his uncle in the meantime. And the Princess listened to it all with the deepest interest, till he mentioned his uncle; then she interrupted him.

"I think your uncle looks very nice," she announced decidedly. "I expect he could play all sorts of games, and roar like a bear, like father does. Do you make him play bears ever?"

The idea of his grave uncle condescending to play at being a bear nearly took Alister's breath away, and he shook his head doubtfully.

"I never asked him," he said; "but I am quite sure he never would."

But the Princess looked unconvinced.

"I'm sure *I* could make him," she said; "I always makes everybody play with me. Even Cousin Mary does, though she puffs ever so when she runs. I can't think why mothers and fathers should want to go away to those stupid abroad places. Mine's gone to see some silly pylamid things—I can't remember the word. But mother had a cough, and she wanted to see them, so they left me and Ruffie behind."

"The Pyramids, was it?" suggested Alister. "I've heard lots about them."

"Nasty, ugly old things!" said the Prin-

cess viciously. "I'm sure my home in the country is much nicer, and Ruffie and me hates London. We've comed to stay with Cousin Mary till they come home—us, and nurse, and the canaries, and the dormouse, and heaps of things; but we don't like it a bit."

"No more do I," replied Alister. "I think it's a horrid place. There isn't even a field to play in, and nurse always will go for walks where there are nothing but shops."

The Princess drew nearer and spoke in a confidential whisper.

"Do you know," she said, "I believe there are some real fields somewhere in London. I heard Cousin Mary speak of them, and I do want to know more about them; but I won't ask her, 'cos she would only say that the Park does very well for Ruffie and me. But you might find out if it's a real, true place from your uncle; 'cos, you know, if I am a princess, you must do everything I tells you."

"Yes," said Alister doubtfully, "I might ask Uncle Gerald, and I daresay he would tell me. What is the name of the place?"

"St. Martin-in-the-Fields. I learnt it most particular," replied the Princess. "I kept on saying it to myself ever so often, so as to be sure and not forget it. And I have a beautiful plan in my head about it, only I can't tell it to you yet; and when I do, you will have to do just exactly what I tell you."

"But when can I tell you what Uncle Gerald says about it?" asked Alister; "because I am quite sure my nurse won't let me talk to you in the street. She won't let me speak to any one that she doesn't know."

"No more will mine," replied the Princess, her eyes dancing with mischief; "but you'll see I shall 'range it somehow. I shall wait till I gets a good chance; and I s'pose you don't mind doing just a rather naughty thing if I tells you to?"

Alister felt rather taken aback. This small princess was so very unlike any one he had ever met before that she filled him with astonishment. Still, she must not be disappointed in her new subject, so he answered manfully,—

"No, I don't mind; only I hope it won't be anything very bad."

"Oh, no!" said the Princess carelessly; "only you must do just as I tells you to when I let you know. Now let's go and dance. I s'pose you know how?"

"I've only tried reels before," replied Alister, rather nervously, "but I should like to try."

"It's quite easy, really. You've only got to keep jiggling about," said the little girl.

Thus encouraged, Alister did try, and, despite a few bumps, enjoyed himself immensely. And later on he and the Princess went in to have supper together, where they talked and laughed, pulled crackers, and ate fruit and cakes to their hearts' content—the only drawback to his enjoyment being that the Princess would insist upon filling her pockets with a collection of little sweet biscuits to take home for Ruffie, which proceeding was quite contrary to Alister's ideas of good behaviour.

When the time came to say good-night, and nurse had come to fetch him home,

the Princess ran after him with a last injunction.

"Now remember," she said, shaking her golden curls impressively, "when I tell you what to do, you are to do it at once."

And having promised obedience, Alister went home, and the very next day he began by asking his uncle if there really was such a place as St. Martin-in-the-Fields.

"Certainly, there is," replied Uncle Gerald. "It is a big church, and I remember once seeing an old picture of it standing in the midst of green fields. But why do you want to know?"

"A little girl asked me last night," said Alister, growing very red.

"What a funny thing for a child to want to know!" remarked Uncle Gerald; then he changed the subject, and thought no more of it.

But for many days to come Alister puzzled over the possibility of conveying this information to the Princess, and waited anxiously for an explanation of her wonderful plan.

He hoped that it would not mean doing

anything very naughty. But the Princess had assured him that it would be nothing very bad; and it was no good calling one's self a loyal subject, unless one were prepared to put up with a little scolding to please the lady you served. Besides which, nurse always seemed to find fault with him whatever he did; not that she intended to be either cross or unkind, but it was so long since she had had anything to do with children that she seemed to have quite forgotten that she had ever been one herself.

But the days grew into weeks, and the weeks lengthened into more than one month, before Alister again got a chance of talking to the Princess.

Whenever they passed each other in the street the little girl would smile and wave her hand. But these friendly overtures were always promptly checked by her nurse. Still, from the mischievous light which sparkled in her eyes whenever she saw him, Alister felt sure that she had not forgotten her promise, and that some day soon he should hear from his little neighbour opposite

CHAPTER III

THE PRINCESS COMMANDS.



ALISTER stood on the doorstep of his uncle's house. He had just been for a walk with nurse, and now he lingered outside, unwilling to go back to his dull nursery.

It was a lovely, sunny day, one of those days which make one feel that spring really must have come to stay at last, and chase away the long, dreary winter.

Even in London the smutty sparrows seemed to be calling and chirruring to each other, rejoicing in the sunshine; and the streets were full of flower-sellers, their baskets piled with violets and daffodils.

"How nice it must be in the country!"

said Alister to himself. "I wonder what the Princess has been doing to-day."

At that moment he noticed James approaching. James was the footman, and always seemed inclined to be very friendly on the rare occasions when nurse allowed her little charge to talk to him. Just now he was smiling and looking much amused.

"I have got a note for you, Master Alister," he said. "It was left for you by the page boy from the house opposite, and he said as how I was to be most particular, and only give it to you yourself; so here it is."

As he spoke he held out a letter—a letter written on bright pink paper, with a picture of a tea-pot and the words "Come early" decorating the envelope.

Alister tore it open eagerly, and drew out an equally bright pink sheet of note-paper. On it was written in a round, childish hand,—

"The Princess commands you to come to tea this afternoon at four. Do not ring the bel but wate."

The writing of this strange invitation, or rather command, was decidedly shaky, while the spelling was a good many degrees worse; but to Alister it seemed the most delightful and exciting of letters, and he never hesitated for a moment about obeying the summons conveyed in it.

It was almost four o'clock now, and he felt half inclined to run across and wait on the doorstep of the house opposite at once, and not even stop to tell nurse anything about it. But then he remembered that he had only got on his old coat, and that his hands had not been washed for some time, which would not do at all to go to tea with a princess, so he rushed off up to the nursery.

"Nurse," he cried, as he burst into the room, "I'm going out to tea, so please put on my best coat, and brush my hair at once."

And nurse, who quite thought that he had lingered downstairs to talk to his uncle, did as she was asked without any questions, rather relieved, perhaps, at the thought of having the afternoon to herself.

"Shall you want me to take you, or to fetch you home, Master Alister?" she asked.

And Alister could truthfully assure her that he did not.

Then, with his heart beating fast with excitement, he ran downstairs and slipped out into the street. So far everything had gone most smoothly; but as he stood on the doorstep of the house opposite, he trembled at the thought that if nurse were to glance out of the window and see him, she would be certain to run out and fetch him in again.

But apparently nurse was not looking out of the window; but some one else was, for he had not waited long before the door was gently opened and the Princess appeared, one finger held up to her rosy lips to command silence. Drawing the little boy inside, she closed the door, and then, seizing his hand, set off upstairs, dragging him along at full speed, and never pausing till they were safely inside the nursery.

Such a nursery too!

Alister stood gazing round him in speechless admiration. The whole room seemed full

of pictures and toys. The walls were gay with a paper covered with brightly-coloured birds, in the window hung a cage full of noisy canaries, while bowls full of primroses and violets were scattered over every available table. On the hearth-rug, before a blazing fire, lay Ruffie; but at the sound of the children's entrance he sprang up, and ran to welcome them with joyous, little barks and much waving of his short, feathery tail.

"Well," said the Princess, "and how do you like my nursery? and don't you think that I have 'ranged about it all beautiful?"

"It's lovely!" answered Alister feelingly; "it's just like fairyland, and you must be the fairy princess. How did you manage it all, and where is your nurse and everybody gone to?"

"I knew you would think me rather clever," cried the Princess modestly, "and I did have to wait such a tellable long time; but to-day Cousin Mary is away, and nurse wanted to go and see her ill mother, so I promised I'd be awfully good and not a bit lonely if I had an extra special good tea, and Jane (that's

the housemaid) to take care of me. Then I told Jane she might go downstairs, as I had a friend coming to tea. And I watched for you myself, 'cos I didn't want her to see as you had got no nurse with you. And when she comes home to-night I shall tell Cousin Mary all about it, and won't she just be 'stonished when she hears that I've had a strange boy to tea with me."

"I hope she won't be angry," said Alister. "Do you think she will scold you very much?"

But the Princess only shook her curly head and laughed.

"I've never scolded much by no one," she said. "Father says I'm a spoilt child; but mother says you aren't spoilt unless you are selfish, and that's horrid. I would tell her all about you if she was here; but she has been and forgot me, I'm sure, 'cos I haven't had a letter for a whole week."

"That's not very long," replied Alister; "I can only get one a week from my father, because there are no more posts from India."

"My mother always writes to me every

day," said the Princess; "only sometimes it is to Ruffie, and sometimes to us both together. And generally there are little pictures of the people she sees; father draws them. And she promised faithful sure that the moment the warmer weather came they would come home and take Ruffie and me to the country; and now I do think it's unkind of them to have forgotten all about us."

"I hope you won't go away just yet," said Alister dismally. "Just think how dreadfully dull I shall be when I haven't even you to look at, Princess!"

"Poor little boy, I will ask my mother to let you come and stay with me. But just now she has forgottted all about me, so you must do what I want. Did you find out about them fields I told you of?"

"Yes," answered Alister. "I asked Uncle Gerald, and he said it was a real place, and that he had seen a picture of it with green fields all round the church."

The Princess sprang up and clapped her hands.

"Then you and me and Ruffie will go to

play in them!" she cried. "We won't wait for mother to come, but you shall take us both there to-morrow."

"But your nurse will never let you go out alone with me. She would say that I couldn't take care of you, even though I am a boy."

"You mustn't contradict a princess, but do as she commands you, else I'll have some one else to be my subject. We will start directly after dinner to-morrow. You must run out into the street when your nurse leaves you, and Ruffie and me will meet you."

"But doesn't it seem rather like cheating?" said Alister anxiously. "I really do think we had better not do it that way."

"If you say one single more 'but,' I shall think you are no better than a quite old person," said the Princess witheringly. "Just look at your knees too. They are not a nice brown any longer; but perhaps if you go to-morrow they will get a better colour, 'cos I shan't like you any longer if they are stupid and white, like other little boys'."

And before this awful threat Alister's resistance quite gave way.

"Very well," he said; "I'll manage to get away somehow, and meet you in the street."

"Hurrah!" cried the Princess, "what fun we will have! I shouldn't wonder if there were violets out in them fields; I am sure there will be at home."

"The snow will just be melting off the hills at my home, but I never saw violets there," remarked Alister.

"What a funny place it must be! Why, we have primroses and daffodils and all sorts of flowers where I live."

"How I should like to see it!" sighed Alister.

"So you shall; I'll make mother ask you," cried the Princess encouragingly.

Then Jane the housemaid opened the door and brought in the tea.

Cousin Mary had certainly kept her promise about its being an extra good one, and Alister thought he had never seen such a tea before, and felt more convinced than ever that this must be a real princess.

"I am going to pour out tea myself, Jane, for a treat," remarked the little girl, "so you need not wait."

And Jane obeyed, leaving the two children alone; while Ruffie sprang up and seated himself in the vacant chair, watching the proceedings with ears cocked and bright eyes gleaming from under his curls.

The tea-pot was a heavy one, and it required the united efforts of both children before they managed to pour out the tea, and they were both hot and thirsty before they had accomplished the feat. But then that only made it taste all the better when they did get it, and Ruffie was allowed to drink up all that had been spilled in the saucers.

"What a jolly paper this is!" observed Alister presently, as he looked round at the birds of many colours which adorned the walls. "I wish my nursery had one like it, instead of a dull old brown thing."

"This one was half my idea," replied the Princess. "You see, Cousin Mary was going to have the room papered, so she asked what

colour Ruffie and me would like; and I said that we wanted something with pictures about the country on it, so she chose this. Wasn't it clever of her? Just at first Ruffie thoughted they were real birds, and runned after them; and he was so s'prised when they did not move. Why don't you ask your uncle to let you have one the same?"

"I should be afraid to ask him. You see I'm quite sure he would call me babyish to want one."

"Well, my father always calls me a baby; but I don't mind. I believe you are ever so frightened of your uncle though. Shall you be afraid to tell him that you have been to tea here?"

"Dreadfully!" replied Alister. "But still I'm glad I came," he added, as he made a fresh attack upon the strawberry jam.

But even the best of teas must come to an end, and by the time this one was over Alister found that it was already so late that if he did not go at once nurse would be beginning to wonder where he was.

So he bade a reluctant good-bye to the pretty, cheerful nursery, and to the smiling little Princess and her devoted attendant, the bright-eyed, soft-coated little Ruffie.

"Remember that you have promised faithful sure to meet Ruffie and me, and to take us to play in them fields, if it is fine to-morrow," were the little girl's parting words.

"I shouldn't wonder if Uncle Gerald forbids me ever to speak to the Princess again though, when he hears where I have been to tea," thought Alister to himself, "and then whatever shall I do? I must tell him when I see him this evening though, because I am sure that father would say it was dishonourable not to do so."

But this good resolution was not put to the test; for when, in answer to Alister's timid ring, the door was opened by the friendly James, he told the little boy that his uncle was dining out, so that he would not see him that evening.

And nurse made no inquiries as to where he had been, merely asking if he had enjoyed his tea-party.

That night Alister went to bed with his head full of the morrow's expedition, at one moment half wishing that it might be a wet day, so that he would escape from his promise to the Princess (for he was old enough to know that it would not be quite so easy for two children alone to find their way to those fields, wherever they were, and back again, as the little girl imagined); at another moment hoping that the day would be fine, and planning about the fun he would have and the games he would play with his little companion.





THE PRINCESS IS FRIGHTENED.

WHEN Alister awoke the next morning he found that the sun was shining brightly, and that the sky was clear and blue, without the slightest trace of a cloud to be seen.

The outside world looked so tempting that he quite forgot his fears of the night before, and only longed for the moment to come when he should run off into the sunshine outside and meet the Princess.

Lessons that morning got on very badly indeed, for the little boy's thoughts were much too busy with plans for the afternoon's adventure for him to be able to pay proper attention to the mysteries of Latin grammar or sums.

And by the time that his dinner-hour came he was almost too much excited to eat.

What a long time nurse did take over her meal too! It seemed as if she would never finish, and allow him an opportunity of slipping out unobserved. But at last she rose, and after collecting the plates and dishes, prepared to carry them off downstairs, telling Alister that she would be back before long to take him out for a walk.

This was the moment for which the little boy had been waiting; and no sooner was nurse safely downstairs, than he seized his cap, and without waiting to change the house shoes he was wearing, crept softly downstairs, and opening the front door with as little noise as possible, slipped out.

Just at first he thought that the street was deserted; but no sooner did he emerge on to the pavement, than the Princess, closely followed by the faithful Ruffie, appeared up the steps of a neighbouring area, and darting across the road, seized his hand.

"Come quick!" she cried; "I've been waiting ages, and I'm sure nurse will be coming to look for me soon. I hid down that little staircase so that she should not see me

if she looked out of the window. Let's run ever so fast."

And run they did—up one street and down another, round squares and over crossings, Ruffie keeping close to their heels, until they were out of breath, and had hopelessly lost any idea of the direction in which they were going.

"We can stop and walk now, I should think," gasped the Princess at last. "I'm sure we are quite losted now, and nurse will never find us. I thoughted she would never leave the nursery to-day; and when she did, I runned off so quick that I had no time to put on my coat. But I aren't a bit cold without it."

Alister looked round at the little girl, and now that he had time to notice he saw that she was wearing a thin, white frock, with no outdoor clothes on except a red cap perched on her sunny curls.

"You've got hot because we've run such a lot," he said; "but if you feel cold later you shall wear my coat. I suppose we ought to ask our way soon, or we may be going all

in the wrong direction. Whom shall we ask?"

"We must choose some one who does not look cross, or in too great a hurry," replied the Princess decidedly.

For some time the two children wandered along, unable to make up their minds to accost any of the passers-by. At last the Princess caught sight of a good-natured-looking errand boy loitering along towards them.

"Please, Mr. Boy," she said politely, "will you tell us how to go to St. Martin-in-the-Fields?"

The boy stopped, and gazed at the two little figures before him in surprise.

"St. Martin-in-the-Fields!" he repeated; "that seems a long way for a little lady like you to go. But I can easily direct you to it. Just keep on up this 'ere road till you come to a big street with lots of cabs and carriages; then turn to your right, and go straight on for a long way. And if you go as far as you can, you're bound to find it; or perhaps you had better ask again when you get to the circus."

The two children thanked him, and set off again.

"I wonder what sort of a circus it is," remarked the Princess. "I went to see one once, and it was such fun! I s'pose we haven't got enough pennies to go and see it to-day?"

"I'm sure that we haven't nearly enough money," said Alister decidedly; "besides, we shall have no time when we get to the fields, if we don't hurry. That boy said it was a long way. Just look at Ruffie; what is he doing?"

"Why, he has found a black beetle, and is hunting it!" cried the Princess. "Clever Ruffie! Let's help him."

And regardless of her white frock she knelt down on the dusty pavement, encouraging the little dog, who was barking wildly and making funny little dashes at a small black object on the pavement.

It was a quiet street, and no one came along to disturb them, so the excitement of the beetle hunt lasted some time; and when at length the Princess consented to continue

her journey, she was no longer as clean or tidy as she had been when she started.

At first they talked and laughed, and ran races as they went; but when they reached the wide street to which the boy had directed them, the rattle and noise of traffic was quite bewildering, and they walked along soberly hand in hand, Ruffie trotting close at their heels.

Cabs and carriages, omnibuses and carts, all seemed to be tearing past in the wildest confusion, and to the two country-bred children the crowd and confusion seemed most alarming, and they made but slow progress. For one thing, the Princess absolutely refused to be hurried, and kept stopping to watch any of the passing carriages which caught her fancy. Then when they came to some iron railings she would insist upon swinging herself on every one of them, declaring that, as nurse never allowed her to do so, she must make the most of the opportunity. As for the crossings, it was almost impossible to persuade her to venture over the quietest ones; and when presently they came to a wide one,

where there was a great deal of traffic, she refused to attempt it.

"I know we shall get runned over," she declared; "and Ruffie is so frightened I must carry him."

So with some difficulty Ruffie was hoisted into his little mistress's arms, and again Alister tried to persuade her to make the attempt, but all in vain.

"I want a perliceman to take me over," she cried; then catching sight of one standing in the middle of the crossing, "Mr. Perliceman!" she called at the pitch of her childish voice.

The policeman turned, and seeing the little girl making frantic signals to him from the pavement, he came towards her.

"Well, my little miss, and what can I do for you?" he asked good-naturedly.

"Carry us over, please, Mr. Perliceman," commanded the Princess—"me and Ruffie; we is frightened. Alister will walk."

"You are sure you want to cross? What are two little things like you doing out alone?" said the policeman doubtfully.

"This little boy is taking care of me, and we aren't going far, so please carry me over quick," replied the Princess decidedly.

The policeman reluctantly did as he was asked, though after he had set the Princess on her feet again after carrying her over the crossing, and had received her thanks, he stood watching the two little figures as they disappeared down the street hand in hand.

"I do hope I ain't done wrong in letting them go," he said to himself uneasily; "but the little lady was so imperious I really didn't like to say her nay."

Meanwhile the two children were beginning to wonder how much further they had to go. They had left off talking now, and trudged along wearily, neither of them liking to be the first to confess how tired they were. The bright sunshine was gone, too, having given place to a dull, grey mist, which made the little girl shiver in her thin frock.

"I'm sure it must be tea-time," she said dolefully.

"So am I," agreed Alister; "but look, Princess, here's a confectioner's shop. I've

got two pennies, so we will go in and eat some buns ; and, I'm sure, we can't have much further to go."

The Princess's face cleared at this suggestion, and after the rest of sitting down in a nice warm shop, and the enjoyment of a sugary bun, she cheered up wonderfully, and when they started again, she allowed herself to be piloted over a big crossing by Alister.

Here the street seemed to branch off in several different directions ; but as the children stood irresolute, uncertain which way to go, the little girl's attention was attracted by a brightly-coloured poster on the wall of a big building close by.

"This must be the circus, I'm sure," she cried. "Look at that picture. I don't see the lady jumping through a hoop ; but there is a man in a queer dress, just like they had at the one I saw. There's a kind-looking old gentleman ; I'll ask him."

Letting go of Alister's hand she ran forward.

"Please will you tell 'me if this are a circus?" she asked ; "'cos the boy said we must ask our way when we got there."

"Circus!—oh dear, no! This is a theatre," replied the old gentleman; then as she was turning away he stopped her. "Wait a minute, child," he cried; "if you were told to ask your way when you got to the circus, it must be Piccadilly Circus you mean. And so you thought it was a place with horses and clowns, did you?" he continued, with a chuckle. "Not a bit of it, my dear; this is all the circus," and he waved his hand towards the busy square where so many streets seemed to meet.

"Then will you please show us the way to St. Martin-in-the-Fields?" said Alister.

And the old gentleman complied, showing them which streets to follow, and telling them that it was not far away.

"It's really very puzzling," sighed the Princess — "a circus which aren't really a circus at all, and fields close by when the streets seem to be more Londony than ever. Ruffie and me are so tired too; and I've frightened, 'cos we do seem such a long way from home."

Alister made no answer. To tell the truth,

this was just what he was beginning to feel himself; but suddenly he stopped, with an exclamation of dismay.

"*That* can't be the church!" he cried; "and yet the old gentleman said we should see it down here. But where are the fields?"

"If that ugly, dirty old place is it, peoples have all told us stories!" cried the Princess, in a tearful voice. "Ask somebody—quick! 'cos I feel as if I must cry soon if I don't find them fields."

Alister stopped one of the crowd of passers-by who were hurrying past, and timidly inquired if the church before them was St. Martin's.

"Yes, that's it right enough," replied the man, scarcely pausing in his hurried walk to answer the question.

This was too much for the Princess.

"There aren't no fields at all then," she sobbed. "And I am so cold; and I'm sure we are losted."

Alister pulled off his own coat, which he wrapped round the little girl, while he did his best to comfort her.

"But my legs is so tired they can't go no further," she wailed, "and it's beginning to rain."

And, sure enough, some heavy drops were beginning to fall.

"Let's go and sit down on the steps of the church," suggested Alister; "we can rest there, and if we go near the top we shall be sheltered from the rain."

So the two children crept up the steps, and sat clinging together, while Ruffie licked them gently, as the only consolation it was in his power to offer.

They had not been long in their retreat, however, before a rough voice made them start, and looking up they found a policeman standing over them.

"Come," he said, "move on! you mustn't stay here, you know." Then seeing that they did not move, but only gazed at him in bewilderment, he made as if he would seize them. "If you won't go, I must take you," he said, threateningly.

But the Princess sprang to her feet and rushed down the steps, pulling Alister after her.

"Be quick!" she cried; "I do believe he is going to take us to prison. And I did think perlicemen were always kind, 'cept to naughty people."

They were back in the busy street now, and as they paused, uncertain which way to turn, she began to cry again.

"I am so frightened," she sobbed, "and I can't go no further."

"What's the matter with the little gal?" inquired a rough-looking man, who was lounging near by.

"I want to go home, I want my tea, and I want my nurse," replied the Princess, in a doleful voice.

At the mention of nurse the man looked closer at the two little figures before him, and noticed that, although the little girl wore a coat which was several sizes too big for her, while the boy had none at all, still her crumpled white frock was of fine embroidery, while round her neck hung a tiny gold chain and locket. Altogether, they were evidently not the poor children he had taken them for.

"If you tell me where your 'ome is, per-

haps I could 'elp you to find it, little missy," he said.

"Our address is 10 Eaton Street," replied Alister, giving the number of his uncle's house.

"And if I took you back there, do you think as 'ow they'd be willing to give a pore man something for 'is trouble?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the Princess eagerly. "I'm sure Cousin Mary will give you lots and lots of pennies."

"Then I'll take you, missy," replied the man, with a chuckle; "and we'd better start at once, for it's a long way to take a pore man such a night as this;" and he seized the little girl by the hand.



CHAPTER V

THE PRINCESS IS RESCUED.



BUT we can't walk any more, I'm much too tired," said the Princess, trying to pull her hand away.

"To be sure you are, and as it isn't every day as I have the chance of driving with a little lady like you, we'll take a cab," replied

the man; "and I suppose they'll be glad enough to pay the fare when they get you 'ome," and he beckoned to a passing hansom.

"I wish we had thought of asking a cabman to take us home ourselves," whispered

the Princess. "I don't like this man; he holds my hand so tight, and he is so dirty."

"Never mind, I'll sit next him, and it can't take very long to drive home," returned Alister consolingly.

So the Princess allowed herself to be lifted into the cab, where she edged as far into the corner as possible, clinging closely to Alister, while Ruffie sat between them and growled at every movement of their strange companion.

On and on they went, through the rain and gathering gloom, till the tired children's heads began to nod drowsily, and when at last the cab stopped they woke up with a start.

The man sprang out, and lifting them both on to the pavement, ran up the steps and rang the bell.

"This doesn't look like the house a bit," said Alister, rubbing his eyes sleepily. "It's the right number, but I'm sure uncle's door isn't painted this colour."

As he spoke the door in question was opened, and an elderly maid-servant appeared.

"Is your master at home?" inquired the man; and when the servant gave an unwilling

"Yes," he pushed past her into the hall, drawing the two children after him. "Go and say as 'ow I must see him," he said; "I've brought back something as was lost."

The maid closed the door, and with a suspicious glance at the little group, hurried upstairs.

"Please, I'm afraid you've made a mistake," began Alister timidly. "This—"

But the man would not allow him to finish.

"Don't you talk nonsense," he said, "and be sure you tell 'ow kind I've been to you."

At that moment an old gentleman came down the stairs and advanced towards them.

"May I ask what business you have with me?" he inquired sharply.

"Why, 'aven't I brought your two children back, sir? I found them wandering about, and when they told me their address, I brought them 'ome, though it is a long way for a pore man like me."

"*My* children!" repeated the old gentleman, in bewilderment. "But I haven't got any; and if these two young ragamuffins really told you that they lived here, they must have done it to hoax you."

The man turned furiously upon the two trembling and bewildered children.

"You wicked little liars, I'll teach you to take me in again!" he cried, making a threatening dive at them.

But the Princess eluded his grasp, and springing to the old gentleman's side, looked up imploringly.

"Don't let him call us bad names," she sobbed. "We told him this wasn't our house, but he wouldn't listen. My house is ever so much prettier than this, and we don't want to stay here. We want to go home; and please don't let him hurt us."

"No one shall hurt you, my dear," replied the old gentleman, in quite a gentle voice; then turning to the man, he added, "This is evidently some mistake. They have got lost, I suppose, and the best thing you can do is to go to the police about them."

"But why should they tell me lies about the address?" persisted the man.

"How dare you say I told a lie!" cried Alister. "My uncle's address is 10 Eaton Street, whatever you say."

The old gentleman glanced up quickly as if struck by some sudden idea.

"Mrs. Sim!" he called; then, as the elderly maid appeared in answer to his summons, "Take these two children into the dining-room and give them some tea. And listen, here," he continued, in an audible whisper, "mind you don't let them run away; keep them in your sight till I find out where to send them."

So, much against their wills, but too tired and frightened to protest, the two children allowed themselves to be led into the dining-room. It was an ugly, dingy room, but a bright fire was burning in the grate, before which Ruffie promptly threw himself down, while Mrs. Sim brought forward two chairs, upon which she ordered her charges to seat themselves. Then telling them to be good children, and not to move while she fetched them some tea, she left the room, closing the door carefully behind her.

No sooner had the sound of her footsteps died away than the Princess ran to Alister's side, clinging closely to him for protection.

"Alister," she whispered, "did you hear what the old gentleman said about sending to the perlice? What do you think he meant?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," replied the little boy dismally, "but he spoke as if we were ever such naughty children. I do wish I could hear what he is saying to that man outside in the passage; then we should know what he means to do with us. Perhaps if I open the door a tiny chink I might listen."

So, getting off his chair, he stole across the floor on tip-toe, and grasping the door handle, turned it as noiselessly as he could. But it did not open; so he tried it the other way. Still it did not open; and growing reckless, he turned it first one way then the other, shaking the door in his eagerness. Then he turned to his companion with a terrified face.

"She has locked us in!" he gasped.

"Oh, I know what it is," whispered the Princess, in a despairing voice. "They have locked us in here, and they've sent for them perlicemen to come and take us to prison."

Oh, why doesn't somebody come and rescue us!"

"I'll try and think of some way to escape; only you mustn't begin to cry again. And I hear that cross woman coming back, so come back to our chairs, quick!" cried Alister.

And they had scarcely time to scramble back to their seats before the door opened and Mrs. Sim came in, carrying a tray with tea things, which she set down on the table, bidding them draw their chairs up and take what they wanted to eat.

What a strange meal that was! The two children were too much upset by the strangeness of their surroundings and the terrifying discovery of the locked door to do more than pretend to eat, while Mrs. Sim did not help to reassure them by gazing at them in grim silence. She did not care for children at any time, and as at that moment she had a friend waiting downstairs to have tea with her, she was only anxious to get rid of these two tiresome little intruders as soon as possible.

Ruffie, in fact, was the only one of the

party who was enjoying himself as he ate up all the scraps of bread and butter which his little mistress managed to convey to him unobserved.

No sooner was tea over than Mrs. Sim rose, and picking up the tray, carried it off, telling the children she would be back soon. And this time they distinctly heard the key turn in the lock.

For a few minutes they remained silent, gazing at the door in hopeless despair. Then the Princess began to cry quietly.

"I'm sure that they will be coming d'rectly to take us to prison," she whispered. "Oh! I do wish I hadn't been naughty and runned away."

"I've been thinking," said Alister, "that if they keep the door locked, we must try and get out by the window. I believe I could open it if I stand on that chair close by, only I wonder if it will make a dreadful noise."

The Princess dried her eyes and clapped her hands softly.

"What a good idea!" she cried. "Of course

people in stories are always rescued through windows when doors is locked. I'll hold the chair steady while you try the window."

So Alister climbed up, and found that he could unfasten the latch without any difficulty. Then he began to push the sash up very slowly and carefully, pausing in nervous terror every time it creaked, until at last he had succeeded in opening it enough to allow him to lean right out of the window. Then he drew back with an exclamation of dismay.

"There's the area underneath," he said—"I'd quite forgotten it; and we should have to clamber on to the little wall beside the steps up to the front door. I could do it all right, but I don't believe you would ever manage it."

"I can climb trees ever so well, and I believe I can scramble out of this window," answered the Princess; "only you must go first, and stand on the little wall and hold out both your hands to me. And Ruffie will have to follow by himself; I s'pect he can jump that. Come along, Ruffie."

Ruffie, who was fast asleep before the fire,

stretched himself lazily, and came forward unwillingly, eyeing the open window with much disfavour.

"Be quick!" whispered the little girl; "I hear some one walking about in the passage."

Alister wriggled himself hastily out through the open window, and managed to swing himself on to the wall without much difficulty. But when it came to the Princess's turn to follow, she found that it was not quite so easy as she expected. For one thing, her legs were so much shorter, and her frilled petticoats kept catching in the window. At last, however, after several attempts, she managed to reach the wall; but slipping just as she did so, she fell headlong forwards on to the stone steps, cutting her knees and bruising herself badly.

But there was no time for tears, for at any moment some one might open the dining-room door, and, finding the room deserted and the window open, run out to look for them. So, gulping down her sobs, she called softly to Ruffie to follow them.

Poor Ruffie, however, did not at all like the look of the leap which he was expected to make, and, standing on the chair, his fore-paws on the window-sill, he gazed out at them, whining piteously, but quite refusing to jump.

"What shall we do?" cried Alister, in despair. "I'm certain I hear somebody coming. Let's run down the street a little way, and then he is sure to follow."

So, very unwillingly, the Princess allowed herself to be dragged away; but before they had gone far they were stopped by the sound of a piteous howl. There was Ruffie still at the window, and crying to get after them.

"I must run back; I can't leave him!" exclaimed the little girl.

But Alister caught hold of her.

"If he howls like that," he said, "he will bring that cross woman in a moment; and you know they don't put dogs in prison, so very likely they'll let him go, and if we hide somewhere near we can watch for him and call when we see him. There is a house

over there that looks quite empty, and we could hide down the area steps."

And drawing the Princess into the shadow of the empty house, he hurried her down the steps, till they found a corner where they could watch the street without being seen themselves. It was raining hard now, and they shivered with cold as they waited.

Before long they could see some one come to the window behind Ruffie, lift him away, and close it. Then the front door opened and two figures came out and looked up and down the street; but just as they seemed to be debating what to do next, a cab drove quickly up, and a man sprang out. Then there was more talking, and suddenly the door opened again, and out rushed Ruffie. For a few moments he sniffed about, whining softly; then having apparently found what he wanted, he gave a clear, joyous bark, and set off down the street towards the children's hiding-place at full speed. Close behind him came the man whom they had seen drive up to the house, and whose cab was still following as he hurried along.

Down the area steps dashed Ruffie, and flung himself into his little mistress's arms, wild with excitement and delight.

"Alister," called a voice at the same moment, "are you down there?"

Alister gave a cry of relief.

"Oh, Prince Gerald! how glad I am you have come!" he exclaimed, as he ran to meet him.

"Is the little girl there?" inquired his friend. "You get into the cab while I fetch her."

But hearing his words, the Princess, with her arms tightly in her arms, was already on the steps.

"How glad you've come to rescue us, Prince Gerald, for we are so tired and weak and cold," she cried, as she allowed herself to be lifted and carried to the cab, where she and Ruffie both insisted upon sitting on their new friend's knees, while Alister went into a corner, wishing that he could make such liberties with his uncle. "I would like to hear your whole story," he said, "and will wait till you are rested and

have dry clothes on," said Uncle Gerald, as they drove along. "But what I do want to know is why, when you were safe in that house, you were silly enough to run away again. I might not have found you for hours, if it had not been for the little dog."

"We heard them say that they would send for the police," faltered Alister.

"Well, the best thing they could do. The police were looking for you, and would have brought you safe home. As it was, that ragged friend of yours came to try if he could find me at Eaton Street, Belgravia, instead of Eaton Street, Bayswater, which was where he left you. I suppose it never occurred to you that there might be two streets of the same name."

"I hope you gave the poor man some pennies," murmured the Princess sleepily; and being reassured on this point, her golden head sank on to Uncle Gerald's shoulder, and when

drew up at the door of her cousin's house she never woke till he had carried her inside and left her with her friends.

"You had better go to bed at once,

Alistar," said his uncle sternly, as they entered his house. "To-morrow I shall have to punish you for your naughtiness and disobedience. If that poor little girl opposite is ill after this, you will be to blame for persuading her to run away."

"But she wanted—" began Alistar, but his uncle cut him short.

"Don't make things worse by trying to make out that it was the fault of a baby like that," he said. "Besides which I know all about your going to tea there yesterday, and concealing it. The little girl told her nurse about it, and as soon as she was missed they sent over here to see if she was with you. I am disappointed to find how deceitful you have been."

And too weary and miserable to defend himself, Alistar crept up to bed.





CHAPTER VI.

THE PRINCESS TRIUMPHS.

THE next day, however, Alister was ill—much too ill for any one to think of scolding him. His limbs ached, and his head felt heavy and stupid; and when the doctor was called in, he pronounced that the little boy had caught a severe chill, and must be kept warm in bed, and made to drink doses of an uninviting-looking mixture in a bottle, labelled “To be taken every two hours.”

Alister wondered how the Princess was feeling this morning, and hoped that, as she had worn his coat all the time, she had not

taken such a bad cold as himself. He longed to know whether she and Ruffie had gone out for their usual walk ; but nurse looked still too angry with him, after the fright he had given her, for him to venture to inquire from her. And when Uncle Gerald came up to pay him a short visit, he looked so stern and worried that his nephew was afraid to speak to him.

However, the longest day must pass some time, and this one was over at last. When Alister awoke the next morning from a good, long sleep, things did not seem quite so hopeless.

And that day, just as Uncle Gerald was preparing to go up to visit the little invalid, word was brought to him that a lady, who wished most particularly to see him, was waiting in the drawing-room. A good deal surprised, he ran upstairs and opened the door, when the first thing he saw was the Princess, and with her a lady with the same fluffy, golden hair and sparkling blue eyes.

"I hope you will forgive me for troubling you," she said, as he entered, "but my little girl has been so unhappy since we heard that your nephew is ill. She is afraid that you

will blame him too much for their escapade the day before yesterday, and so I thought that she had better come and explain herself how much she was in fault."

"It is very kind of you to come," replied Uncle Gerald, rather bewildered; "but I am afraid there is no excuse for a boy of Alister's age leading a child, almost a baby, as your little girl is, into mischief."

But here the Princess, her face very red and her eyes full of tears, stepped forward resolutely.

"I aren't a baby," she announced; "and it was me planned it all about running away, and Alister coming to tea, and everything."

Then she began at the beginning, and told the story of their acquaintance from the day of their meeting at the children's party.

"And please, Alister's uncle, you won't be angry with him any more, will you?" she added, in conclusion; "for, you see, it was most my fault; and then, you know, he did tell you about the tea, though he was dreadfully frightened of you."

"But he did *not* tell me, and that was

really what I was most angry about; it seemed so deceitful," replied Uncle Gerald.

"I'm sure he did though," persisted the little girl; "'cos he said last thing he should tell you at once and get it over. P'raps you weren't listening to what he said."

Uncle Gerald's face cleared.

"Now I remember," he exclaimed. "I was out to dinner that night, so he did not see me. But I am glad to think that he meant to tell me; and I think that, after all, perhaps, he has been enough punished by being so ill, so I suppose I must promise to say no more about it."

"Thank you *very* much," said the Princess, gratefully. "I likes you very much, and I aren't a bit frightened of you; but Alister is."

"I don't want him to be. Don't you think you could tell me what to do not to be quite such an ogre to my nephew?"

"I s'pect I could. I'll think about it, and tell you anything I can, 'cos you've been nice and not cross," replied the little girl.

"And I hope that you will let me come and see Alister to-morrow," said her mother,

as she rose to go. "I used to know his father quite well—I recognized the name as soon as I heard it—so I hope that I may be allowed to come and help to amuse the poor little fellow while he is ill."

"And be sure you say that the Princess's mother is coming to see him. You mustn't say our real big name, or it will quite spoil all the nice mystery," broke in the Princess; "and please tell him that I was a silly, naughty little girl to think that my mother could forget me. She had only not written 'cos she was coming home as a surprise; and when I got back I found her there, and dreadfully frightened. But I aren't never going to be so silly, and not trust her again, so be sure you tell him."

After promising to deliver this message, Uncle Gerald said good-bye, and went upstairs to tell Alister about his visitors.

How delighted the little boy was too! Uncle Gerald was so kind, and not angry any more; and the prospect of actually having a visit from the Princess's mother seemed too good to be true—the only draw-

back to his happiness being that he was afraid that, now his little friend had got her father and mother home again, she would soon be leaving the house opposite.

Next day the Princess's mother arrived, accompanied by her little girl and Ruffie; and after having a talk with Uncle Gerald, she went upstairs to visit the invalid, leaving her escort to go on for a walk with nurse.

But the Princess objected to this arrangement.

"If I mayn't go upstairs with her, I would rather stay and talk to you; so would Ruffie. May we, Alister's uncle?"

"Of course you may," answered Uncle Gerald, much flattered. "Come to my room, and we will see if the cook has any cakes which would suit you and Master Ruffie."

The little girl seated herself with an air of demure propriety.

"I've been thinking ever so," she said; "and I'm quite sure that if my lovely plan comes true, and Alister goes to the country—like the doctor says he must—he will feel dreadful dull when he gets back here, 'cos, you see, he won't even have me and Ruffie to

watch. Now I don't expect you knows one bit how to make him feel pleased and 'cited."

"No, I'm sure I don't; but perhaps you can advise me."

"I don't know what ervise means, but I have made up a lovely plan for you. While he is away you must have the nursery done with a paper covered with birds and flowers, as like mine as you can get it, 'cos he loved that; and be sure the birds is blue and red."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Uncle Gerald, "I had no idea a wall paper could make so much difference in a person's—even a child's—happiness."

"Course it can. He will feel quite like being in the country when he looks at it. My birds have all got names; and Cousin Mary says it isn't very 'spensive."

And Uncle Gerald, much amused, promised that he would see to it at once, on condition that she and Ruffie would pay him a visit as soon as it was done.

Meanwhile upstairs mother was seated by Alister's bed. He lay gazing at her with admiring eyes.

"She is the Prin—I mean the little girl who has come to stay with the old lady in the house opposite," replied Alister; and to himself he added, "She certainly is a princess, or she would never dare to order Uncle Gerald about like that. And he didn't seem to mind about not knowing her either; he looked quite pleased. It is nice to be a princess!"



first; and now that he has given his consent, I am going to write to your father and tell him we have stolen his little boy for a time; for I know your father quite well—in fact, he was a great friend of my husband's, although we have not seen him for some years. So now all that you have got to do is to get well enough to travel as quickly as possible."

"And I may ride the black pony, and play with the Princess and Ruffie all day long, and see all those flowers that she told me about?" cried the little boy, his eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Well, yes; I think that I may safely promise to let you do all those things," replied his visitor. "And if you do enjoy yourself, I want you to promise me in return to try to remember that it is your uncle who has allowed you to come; because, if you once understand that he wants you to be happy and to enjoy yourself, perhaps another time when you are tempted to do anything so naughty and foolish as to run away as you did without consulting any one, you will learn to trust him enough to know that if

Ruffie clasped tightly in her arms, despite his struggles to get down.

When Alister opened the door the Princess was speaking in her clear, childish voice.

"Take that leading-rein away," he could hear her saying. "You know I never have one; and you are to ride quite far behind me, 'cos I aren't a baby."

"But just through the streets, missy," urged the coachman. "If you let me lead you till we get to the Park, I will ride behind you then."

"Yes, dear," struck in the old lady persuasively, "that will be much safer. Just think, if you were to meet a motor car, or perhaps a lion or a tiger going to the Zoo, I am sure you would be frightened if you had no one beside you, and so would the pony."

"Perhaps he would be," agreed the Princess doubtfully; "so if you think he will be happier, you may put it on for a few minutes. Oh! look, Cousin Mary!" she added, as she caught sight of Alister, "there is the little boy opposite. Why does he wear petticoats?"

"Hush, dear, that's a kilt," replied the old lady, in an audible whisper.

the best of childhood—its plans do sometimes come true, and are not like those of grown-up people, generally disappointing in their fulfilment; perhaps because they are often just “good and sensible wishes,” as the Princess’s mother said.

But of all that delightful time I cannot tell you now—that would take a book all to itself; how he rode the black pony—and fell off, too, sometimes—ran races with Ruffie, and played with the Princess through the long spring days.

Only children are supposed to be spoilt, but as long as they do not grow selfish, I never can see that that matters much. And the Princess was not selfish; for she had been taught that if you are very happy yourself, the best thing in the world is to try to make other people happy too. If any “only children” read this story, I hope they will remember that this is the great secret of a happy life, and that it is not in the least necessary for a spoilt child to be a selfish one.

So the Princess shared her toys and pets—even the affections of her beloved Ruffie—

with her little visitor, who in return thought there was nobody in the world could compare with her, which is quite the light in which a subject should look upon his liege lady.

That visit, too, was only the first of many happy ones; and later on, when father came home from India, Alister had the delight of receiving the Princess and Ruffie in his own home in the Highlands.

And though he is quite a big boy now—so big, in fact, that he has been at school for a whole year—still no little dog is half so beautiful in his eyes as dear, little, bright-eyed, fluffy-haired Ruffie, who, by-the-bye, is more like a tiny miniature St. Bernard than anything else. Nor do I think that any little girl will ever take the place in his affections which is held by the Princess who lived opposite.

THE END.



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"I think your uncle looks very nice," she announced decidedly. "I expect he could play all sorts of games, and roar like a bear, like father does. Do you make him play bears ever?"

The idea of his grave uncle condescending to play at being a bear nearly took Alister's breath away, and he shook his head doubtfully.

"I never asked him," he said; "but I am quite sure he never would."

But the Princess looked unconvinced.

"I'm sure *I* could make him," she said; "I always makes everybody play with me. Even Cousin Mary does, though she puffs ever so when she runs. I can't think why mothers and fathers should want to go away to those stupid abroad places. Mine's gone to see some silly pylamid things—I can't remember the word. But mother had a cough, and she wanted to see them, so they lefted me and Ruffie behind."

"The Pyramids, was it?" suggested Alister. "I've heard lots about them."

"Nasty, ugly old things!" said the Prin-

cess viciously. "I'm sure my home in the country is much nicer, and Ruffie and me hates London. We've comed to stay with Cousin Mary till they come home—us, and nurse, and the canaries, and the dormouse, and heaps of things; but we don't like it a bit."

"No more do I," replied Alister. "I think it's a horrid place. There isn't even a field to play in, and nurse always will go for walks where there are nothing but shops."

The Princess drew nearer and spoke in a confidential whisper.

"Do you know," she said, "I believe there are some real fields somewhere in London. I heard Cousin Mary speak of them, and I do want to know more about them; but I won't ask her, 'cos she would only say that the Park does very well for Ruffie and me. But you might find out if it's a real, true place from your uncle; 'cos, you know, if I am a princess, you must do everything I tells you."

"Yes," said Alister doubtfully, "I might ask Uncle Gerald, and I daresay he would tell me. What is the name of the place?"

"St. Martin-in-the-Fields. I learnt it most particular," replied the Princess. "I kept on saying it to myself ever so often, so as to be sure and not forget it. And I have a beautiful plan in my head about it, only I can't tell it to you yet; and when I do, you will have to do just exactly what I tell you."

"But when can I tell you what Uncle Gerald says about it?" asked Alister; "because I am quite sure my nurse won't let me talk to you in the street. She won't let me speak to any one that she doesn't know."

"No more will mine," replied the Princess, her eyes dancing with mischief; "but you'll see I shall 'range it somehow. I shall wait till I gets a good chance; and I s'pose you don't mind doing just a rather naughty thing if I tells you to?"

Alister felt rather taken aback. This small princess was so very unlike any one he had ever met before that she filled him with astonishment. Still, she must not be disappointed in her new subject, so he answered manfully,—

"No, I don't mind; only I hope it won't be anything very bad."

"Oh, no!" said the Princess carelessly; "only you must do just as I tells you to when I let you know. Now let's go and dance. I s'pose you know how?"

"I've only tried reels before," replied Alister, rather nervously, "but I should like to try."

"It's quite easy, really. You've only got to keep jiggling about," said the little girl.

Thus encouraged, Alister did try, and, despite a few bumps, enjoyed himself immensely. And later on he and the Princess went in to have supper together, where they talked and laughed, pulled crackers, and ate fruit and cakes to their hearts' content—the only drawback to his enjoyment being that the Princess would insist upon filling her pockets with a collection of little sweet biscuits to take home for Ruffie, which proceeding was quite contrary to Alister's ideas of good behaviour.

When the time came to say good-night, and nurse had come to fetch him home,

the Princess ran after him with a last injunction.

"Now remember," she said, shaking her golden curls impressively, "when I tell you what to do, you are to do it at once."

And having promised obedience, Alister went home, and the very next day he began by asking his uncle if there really was such a place as St. Martin-in-the-Fields.

"Certainly, there is," replied Uncle Gerald. "It is a big church, and I remember once seeing an old picture of it standing in the midst of green fields. But why do you want to know?"

"A little girl asked me last night," said Alister, growing very red.

"What a funny thing for a child to want to know!" remarked Uncle Gerald; then he changed the subject, and thought no more of it.

But for many days to come Alister puzzled over the possibility of conveying this information to the Princess, and waited anxiously for an explanation of her wonderful plan.

He hoped that it would not mean doing

anything very naughty. But the Princess had assured him that it would be nothing very bad ; and it was no good calling one's self a loyal subject, unless one were prepared to put up with a little scolding to please the lady you served. Besides which, nurse always seemed to find fault with him whatever he did ; not that she intended to be either cross or unkind, but it was so long since she had had anything to do with children that she seemed to have quite forgotten that she had ever been one herself.

But the days grew into weeks, and the weeks lengthened into more than one month, before Alister again got a chance of talking to the Princess.

Whenever they passed each other in the street the little girl would smile and wave her hand. But these friendly overtures were always promptly checked by her nurse. Still, from the mischievous light which sparkled in her eyes whenever she saw him, Alister felt sure that she had not forgotten her promise, and that some day soon he should hear from his little neighbour opposite

CHAPTER III

THE PRINCESS COMMANDS.



ALISTER stood on the doorstep of his uncle's house. He had just been for a walk with nurse, and now he lingered outside, unwilling to go back to his dull nursery.

It was a lovely, sunny day, one of those days which make one feel that spring really must have come to stay at last, and chase away the long, dreary winter.

Even in London the smutty sparrows seemed to be calling and chirruping to each other, rejoicing in the sunshine; and the streets were full of flower-sellers, their baskets piled with violets and daffodils.

"How nice it must be in the country!"

said Alister to himself. "I wonder what the Princess has been doing to-day."

At that moment he noticed James approaching. James was the footman, and always seemed inclined to be very friendly on the rare occasions when nurse allowed her little charge to talk to him. Just now he was smiling and looking much amused.

"I have got a note for you, Master Alister," he said. "It was left for you by the page boy from the house opposite, and he said as how I was to be most particular, and only give it to you yourself; so here it is."

As he spoke he held out a letter—a letter written on bright pink paper, with a picture of a tea-pot and the words "Come early" decorating the envelope.

Alister tore it open eagerly, and drew out an equally bright pink sheet of note-paper. On it was written in a round, childish hand,—

"The Princess commands you to come to tea this afternoon at four. Do not ring the bel but wate."

The writing of this strange invitation, or rather command, was decidedly shaky, while the spelling was a good many degrees worse; but to Alister it seemed the most delightful and exciting of letters, and he never hesitated for a moment about obeying the summons conveyed in it.

It was almost four o'clock now, and he felt half inclined to run across and wait on the doorstep of the house opposite at once, and not even stop to tell nurse anything about it. But then he remembered that he had only got on his old coat, and that his hands had not been washed for some time, which would not do at all to go to tea with a princess, so he rushed off up to the nursery.

"Nurse," he cried, as he burst into the room, "I'm going out to tea, so please put on my best coat, and brush my hair at once."

And nurse, who quite thought that he had lingered downstairs to talk to his uncle, did as she was asked without any questions, rather relieved, perhaps, at the thought of having the afternoon to herself.

"Shall you want me to take you, or to fetch you home, Master Alister?" she asked.

And Alister could truthfully assure her that he did not.

Then, with his heart beating fast with excitement, he ran downstairs and slipped out into the street. So far everything had gone most smoothly; but as he stood on the doorstep of the house opposite, he trembled at the thought that if nurse were to glance out of the window and see him, she would be certain to run out and fetch him in again.

But apparently nurse was not looking out of the window; but some one else was, for he had not waited long before the door was gently opened and the Princess appeared, one finger held up to her rosy lips to command silence. Drawing the little boy inside, she closed the door, and then, seizing his hand, set off upstairs, dragging him along at full speed, and never pausing till they were safely inside the nursery.

Such a nursery too!

Alister stood gazing round him in speechless admiration. The whole room seemed full

of pictures and toys. The walls were gay with a paper covered with brightly-coloured birds, in the window hung a cage full of noisy canaries, while bowls full of primroses and violets were scattered over every available table. On the hearth-rug, before a blazing fire, lay Ruffie; but at the sound of the children's entrance he sprang up, and ran to welcome them with joyous, little barks and much waving of his short, feathery tail.

"Well," said the Princess, "and how do you like my nursery? and don't you think that I have 'ranged about it all beautiful?"

"It's lovely!" answered Alister feelingly; "it's just like fairyland, and you must be the fairy princess. How did you manage it all, and where is your nurse and everybody gone to?"

"I knew you would think me rather clever," cried the Princess modestly, "and I did have to wait such a tellable long time; but to-day Cousin Mary is away, and nurse wanted to go and see her ill mother, so I promised I'd be awfully good and not a bit lonely if I had an extra special good tea, and Jane (that's

the housemaid) to take care of me. Then I told Jane she might go downstairs, as I had a friend coming to tea. And I watched for you myself, 'cos I didn't want her to see as you had got no nurse with you. And when she comes home to-night I shall tell Cousin Mary all about it, and won't she just be 'stonished when she hears that I've had a strange boy to tea with me."

"I hope she won't be angry," said Alister. "Do you think she will scold you very much?"

But the Princess only shook her curly head and laughed.

"I've never scolded much by no one," she said. "Father says I'm a spoilt child; but mother says you aren't spoilt unless you are selfish, and that's horrid. I would tell her all about you if she was here; but she has been and forgotted me, I'm sure, 'cos I haven't had a letter for a whole week."

"That's not very long," replied Alister; "I can only get one a week from my father, because there are no more posts from India."

"My mother always writes to me every

day," said the Princess; "only sometimes it is to Ruffie, and sometimes to us both together. And generally there are little pictures of the people she sees; father draws them. And she promised faithful sure that the moment the warmer weather came they would come home and take Ruffie and me to the country; and now I do think it's unkind of them to have forgotten all about us."

"I hope you won't go away just yet," said Alister dismally. "Just think how dreadfully dull I shall be when I haven't even you to look at, Princess!"

"Poor little boy, I will ask my mother to let you come and stay with me. But just now she has forgottted all about me, so you must do what I want. Did you find out about them fields I told you of?"

"Yes," answered Alister. "I asked Uncle Gerald, and he said it was a real place, and that he had seen a picture of it with green fields all round the church."

The Princess sprang up and clapped her hands.

"Then you and me and Ruffie will go to

play in them!" she cried. "We won't wait for mother to come, but you shall take us both there to-morrow."

"But your nurse will never let you go out alone with me. She would say that I couldn't take care of you, even though I am a boy."

"You mustn't contradict a princess, but do as she commands you, else I'll have some one else to be my subject. We will start directly after dinner to-morrow. You must run out into the street when your nurse leaves you, and Ruffie and me will meet you."

"But doesn't it seem rather like cheating?" said Alister anxiously. "I really do think we had better not do it that way."

"If you say one single more 'but,' I shall think you are no better than a quite old person," said the Princess witheringly. "Just look at your knees too. They are not a nice brown any longer; but perhaps if you go to-morrow they will get a better colour, 'cos I shan't like you any longer if they are stupid and white, like other little boys'."

And before this awful threat Alister's resistance quite gave way.

"Very well," he said; "I'll manage to get away somehow, and meet you in the street."

"Hurrah!" cried the Princess, "what fun we will have! I shouldn't wonder if there were violets out in them fields; I am sure there will be at home."

"The snow will just be melting off the hills at my home, but I never saw violets there," remarked Alister.

"What a funny place it must be! Why, we have primroses and daffodils and all sorts of flowers where I live."

"How I should like to see it!" sighed Alister.

"So you shall; I'll make mother ask you," cried the Princess encouragingly.

Then Jane the housemaid opened the door and brought in the tea.

Cousin Mary had certainly kept her promise about its being an extra good one, and Alister thought he had never seen such a tea before, and felt more convinced than ever that this must be a real princess.

"I am going to pour out tea myself, Jane, for a treat," remarked the little girl, "so you need not wait."

And Jane obeyed, leaving the two children alone; while Ruffie sprang up and seated himself in the vacant chair, watching the proceedings with ears cocked and bright eyes gleaming from under his curls.

The tea-pot was a heavy one, and it required the united efforts of both children before they managed to pour out the tea, and they were both hot and thirsty before they had accomplished the feat. But then that only made it taste all the better when they did get it, and Ruffie was allowed to drink up all that had been spilled in the saucers.

"What a jolly paper this is!" observed Alister presently, as he looked round at the birds of many colours which adorned the walls. "I wish my nursery had one like it, instead of a dull old brown thing."

"This one was half my idea," replied the Princess. "You see, Cousin Mary was going to have the room papered, so she asked what

colour Ruffie and me would like; and I said that we wanted something with pictures about the country on it, so she chose this. Wasn't it clever of her? Just at first Ruffie thoughted they were real birds, and runned after them; and he was so s'prised when they did not move. Why don't you ask your uncle to let you have one the same?"

"I should be afraid to ask him. You see I'm quite sure he would call me babyish to want one."

"Well, my father always calls me a baby; but I don't mind. I believe you are ever so frightened of your uncle though. Shall you be afraid to tell him that you have been to tea here?"

"Dreadfully!" replied Alister. "But still I'm glad I came," he added, as he made a fresh attack upon the strawberry jam.

But even the best of teas must come to an end, and by the time this one was over Alister found that it was already so late that if he did not go at once nurse would be beginning to wonder where he was.

So he bade a reluctant good-bye to the pretty, cheerful nursery, and to the smiling little Princess and her devoted attendant, the bright-eyed, soft-coated little Ruffie.

"Remember that you have promised faithful sure to meet Ruffie and me, and to take us to play in them fields, if it is fine to-morrow," were the little girl's parting words.

"I shouldn't wonder if Uncle Gerald forbids me ever to speak to the Princess again though, when he hears where I have been to tea," thought Alister to himself, "and then whatever shall I do? I must tell him when I see him this evening though, because I am sure that father would say it was dishonourable not to do so."

But this good resolution was not put to the test; for when, in answer to Alister's timid ring, the door was opened by the friendly James, he told the little boy that his uncle was dining out, so that he would not see him that evening.

And nurse made no inquiries as to where he had been, merely asking if he had enjoyed his tea-party.

That night Alister went to bed with his head full of the morrow's expedition, at one moment half wishing that it might be a wet day, so that he would escape from his promise to the Princess (for he was old enough to know that it would not be quite so easy for two children alone to find their way to those fields, wherever they were, and back again, as the little girl imagined); at another moment hoping that the day would be fine, and planning about the fun he would have and the games he would play with his little companion.





THE PRINCESS IS FRIGHTENED.

WHEN Alister awoke the next morning he found that the sun was shining brightly, and that the sky was clear and blue, without the slightest trace of a cloud to be seen.

The outside world looked so tempting that he quite forgot his fears of the night before, and only longed for the moment to come when he should run off into the sunshine outside and meet the Princess.

Lessons that morning got on very badly indeed, for the little boy's thoughts were much too busy with plans for the afternoon's adventure for him to be able to pay proper attention to the mysteries of Latin grammar or sums.

And by the time that his dinner-hour came he was almost too much excited to eat.

What a long time nurse did take over her meal too! It seemed as if she would never finish, and allow him an opportunity of slipping out unobserved. But at last she rose, and after collecting the plates and dishes, prepared to carry them off downstairs, telling Alister that she would be back before long to take him out for a walk.

This was the moment for which the little boy had been waiting; and no sooner was nurse safely downstairs, than he seized his cap, and without waiting to change the house shoes he was wearing, crept softly downstairs, and opening the front door with as little noise as possible, slipped out.

Just at first he thought that the street was deserted; but no sooner did he emerge on to the pavement, than the Princess, closely followed by the faithful Ruffie, appeared up the steps of a neighbouring area, and darting across the road, seized his hand.

"Come quick!" she cried; "I've been waiting ages, and I'm sure nurse will be coming to look for me soon. I hid down that little staircase so that she should not see me

if she looked out of the window. Let's run ever so fast."

And run they did—up one street and down another, round squares and over crossings, Ruffie keeping close to their heels, until they were out of breath, and had hopelessly lost any idea of the direction in which they were going.

"We can stop and walk now, I should think," gasped the Princess at last. "I'm sure we are quite losted now, and nurse will never find us. I thoughted she would never leave the nursery to-day; and when she did, I runned off so quick that I had no time to put on my coat. But I aren't a bit cold without it."

Alister looked round at the little girl, and now that he had time to notice he saw that she was wearing a thin, white frock, with no outdoor clothes on except a red cap perched on her sunny curls.

"You've got hot because we've run such a lot," he said; "but if you feel cold later you shall wear my coat. I suppose we ought to ask our way soon, or we may be going all

in the wrong direction. Whom shall we ask?"

"We must choose some one who does not look cross, or in too great a hurry," replied the Princess decidedly.

For some time the two children wandered along, unable to make up their minds to accost any of the passers-by. At last the Princess caught sight of a good-natured-looking errand boy loitering along towards them.

"Please, Mr. Boy," she said politely, "will you tell us how to go to St. Martin-in-the-Fields?"

The boy stopped, and gazed at the two little figures before him in surprise.

"St. Martin-in-the-Fields!" he repeated; "that seems a long way for a little lady like you to go. But I can easily direct you to it. Just keep on up this 'ere road till you come to a big street with lots of cabs and carriages; then turn to your right, and go straight on for a long way. And if you go as far as you can, you're bound to find it; or perhaps you had better ask again when you get to the circus."

The two children thanked him, and set off again.

"I wonder what sort of a circus it is," remarked the Princess. "I went to see one once, and it was such fun! I s'pose we haven't got enough pennies to go and see it to-day?"

"I'm sure that we haven't nearly enough money," said Alister decidedly; "besides, we shall have no time when we get to the fields, if we don't hurry. That boy said it was a long way. Just look at Ruffie; what is he doing?"

"Why, he has found a black beetle, and is hunting it!" cried the Princess. "Clever Ruffie! Let's help him."

And regardless of her white frock she knelt down on the dusty pavement, encouraging the little dog, who was barking wildly and making funny little dashes at a small black object on the pavement.

It was a quiet street, and no one came along to disturb them, so the excitement of the beetle hunt lasted some time; and when at length the Princess consented to continue

her journey, she was no longer as clean or tidy as she had been when she started.

At first they talked and laughed, and ran races as they went; but when they reached the wide street to which the boy had directed them, the rattle and noise of traffic was quite bewildering, and they walked along soberly hand in hand, Ruffie trotting close at their heels.

Cabs and carriages, omnibuses and carts, all seemed to be tearing past in the wildest confusion, and to the two country-bred children the crowd and confusion seemed most alarming, and they made but slow progress. For one thing, the Princess absolutely refused to be hurried, and kept stopping to watch any of the passing carriages which caught her fancy. Then when they came to some iron railings she would insist upon swinging herself on every one of them, declaring that, as nurse never allowed her to do so, she must make the most of the opportunity. As for the crossings, it was almost impossible to persuade her to venture over the quietest ones; and when presently they came to a wide one,

where there was a great deal of traffic, she refused to attempt it.

"I know we shall get runned over," she declared; "and Ruffie is so frightened I must carry him."

So with some difficulty Ruffie was hoisted into his little mistress's arms, and again Alister tried to persuade her to make the attempt, but all in vain.

"I want a perliceman to take me over," she cried; then catching sight of one standing in the middle of the crossing, "Mr. Perliceman!" she called at the pitch of her childish voice.

The policeman turned, and seeing the little girl making frantic signals to him from the pavement, he came towards her.

"Well, my little miss, and what can I do for you?" he asked good-naturedly.

"Carry us over, please, Mr. Perliceman," commanded the Princess—"me and Ruffie; we is frightened. Alister will walk."

"You are sure you want to cross? What are two little things like you doing out alone?" said the policeman doubtfully.

"This little boy is taking care of me, and we aren't going far, so please carry me over quick," replied the Princess decidedly.

The policeman reluctantly did as he was asked, though after he had set the Princess on her feet again after carrying her over the crossing, and had received her thanks, he stood watching the two little figures as they disappeared down the street hand in hand.

"I do hope I ain't done wrong in letting them go," he said to himself uneasily; "but the little lady was so imperious I really didn't like to say her nay."

Meanwhile the two children were beginning to wonder how much further they had to go. They had left off talking now, and trudged along wearily, neither of them liking to be the first to confess how tired they were. The bright sunshine was gone, too, having given place to a dull, grey mist, which made the little girl shiver in her thin frock.

"I'm sure it must be tea-time," she said dolefully.

"So am I," agreed Alister; "but look, Princess, here's a confectioner's shop. I've

got two pennies, so we will go in and eat some buns; and, I'm sure, we can't have much further to go."

The Princess's face cleared at this suggestion, and after the rest of sitting down in a nice warm shop, and the enjoyment of a sugary bun, she cheered up wonderfully, and when they started again, she allowed herself to be piloted over a big crossing by Alister.

Here the street seemed to branch off in several different directions; but as the children stood irresolute, uncertain which way to go, the little girl's attention was attracted by a brightly-coloured poster on the wall of a big building close by.

"This must be the circus, I'm sure," she cried. "Look at that picture. I don't see the lady jumping through a hoop; but there is a man in a queer dress, just like they had at the one I saw. There's a kind-looking old gentleman; I'll ask him."

Letting go of Alister's hand she ran forward.

"Please will you tell me if this are a circus?" she asked; "'cos the boy said we must ask our way when we got there."

"Circus!—oh dear, no! This is a theatre," replied the old gentleman; then as she was turning away he stopped her. "Wait a minute, child," he cried; "if you were told to ask your way when you got to the circus, it must be Piccadilly Circus you mean. And so you thought it was a place with horses and clowns, did you?" he continued, with a chuckle. "Not a bit of it, my dear; this is all the circus," and he waved his hand towards the busy square where so many streets seemed to meet.

"Then will you please show us the way to St. Martin-in-the-Fields?" said Alister.

And the old gentleman complied, showing them which streets to follow, and telling them that it was not far away.

"It's really very puzzling," sighed the Princess — "a circus which aren't really a circus at all, and fields close by when the streets seem to be more Londony than ever. Ruffie and me are so tired too; and I'se frightened, 'cos we do seem such a long way from home."

Alister made no answer. To tell the truth,

this was just what he was beginning to feel himself; but suddenly he stopped, with an exclamation of dismay.

"*That* can't be the church!" he cried; "and yet the old gentleman said we should see it down here. But where are the fields?"

"If that ugly, dirty old place is it, peoples have all told us stories!" cried the Princess, in a tearful voice. "Ask somebody—quick! 'cos I feel as if I must cry soon if I don't find them fields."

Alister stopped one of the crowd of passers-by who were hurrying past, and timidly inquired if the church before them was St. Martin's.

"Yes, that's it right enough," replied the man, scarcely pausing in his hurried walk to answer the question.

This was too much for the Princess.

"There aren't no fields at all then," she sobbed. "And I am so cold; and I'm sure we are losted."

Alister pulled off his own coat, which he wrapped round the little girl, while he did his best to comfort her.

"But my legs is so tired they can't go no further," she wailed, "and it's beginning to rain."

And, sure enough, some heavy drops were beginning to fall.

"Let's go and sit down on the steps of the church," suggested Alister; "we can rest there, and if we go near the top we shall be sheltered from the rain."

So the two children crept up the steps, and sat clinging together, while Ruffie licked them gently, as the only consolation it was in his power to offer.

They had not been long in their retreat, however, before a rough voice made them start, and looking up they found a policeman standing over them.

"Come," he said, "move on! you mustn't stay here, you know." Then seeing that they did not move, but only gazed at him in bewilderment, he made as if he would seize them. "If you won't go, I must take you," he said, threateningly.

But the Princess sprang to her feet and rushed down the steps, pulling Alister after her.

"Be quick!" she cried; "I do believe he going to take us to prison. And I did thin perlicemen were always kind, 'cept to naught people."

They were back in the busy street now and as they paused, uncertain which way to turn, she began to cry again.

"I am so frightened," she sobbed, "and I can't go no further."

"What's the matter with the little gal?" inquired a rough-looking man, who was lounging near by.

"I want to go home, I want my tea, and I want my nurse," replied the Princess, in a doleful voice.

At the mention of nurse the man looked closer at the two little figures before him, and noticed that, although the little girl wore a coat which was several sizes too big for her, while the boy had none at all, still her crumpled white frock was of fine embroidery, while round her neck hung a tiny gold chain and locket. Altogether, they were evidently not the poor children he had taken them for.

"If you tell me where your 'ome is, per-

haps I could 'elp you to find it, little missy," he said.

"Our address is 10 Eaton Street," replied Alister, giving the number of his uncle's house.

"And if I took you back there, do you think as 'ow they'd be willing to give a pore man something for 'is trouble?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the Princess eagerly. "I'm sure Cousin Mary will give you lots and lots of pennies."

"Then I'll take you, missy," replied the man, with a chuckle; "and we'd better start at once, for it's a long way to take a pore man such a night as this;" and he seized the little girl by the hand.



"Yes," he pushed past her into the hall, drawing the two children after him. "Go and say as 'ow I must see him," he said; "I've brought back something as was lost."

The maid closed the door, and with a suspicious glance at the little group, hurried upstairs.

"Please, I'm afraid you've made a mistake," began Alister timidly. "This—"

But the man would not allow him to finish.

"Don't you talk nonsense," he said, "and be sure you tell 'ow kind I've been to you."

At that moment an old gentleman came down the stairs and advanced towards them.

"May I ask what business you have with me?" he inquired sharply.

"Why, 'aven't I brought your two children back, sir? I found them wandering about, and when they told me their address, I brought them 'ome, though it is a long way for a pore man like me."

"*My* children!" repeated the old gentleman, in bewilderment. "But I haven't got any; and if these two young ragamuffins really told you that they lived here, they must have done it to hoax you."

The man turned furiously upon the two trembling and bewildered children.

"You wicked little liars, I'll teach you to take me in again!" he cried, making a threatening dive at them.

But the Princess eluded his grasp, and springing to the old gentleman's side, looked up imploringly.

"Don't let him call us bad names," she sobbed. "We told him this wasn't our house, but he wouldn't listen. My house is ever so much prettier than this, and we don't want to stay here. We want to go home; and please don't let him hurt us."

"No one shall hurt you, my dear," replied the old gentleman, in quite a gentle voice; then turning to the man, he added, "This is evidently some mistake. They have got lost, I suppose, and the best thing you can do is to go to the police about them."

"But why should they tell me lies about the address?" persisted the man.

"How dare you say I told a lie!" cried Alister. "My uncle's address is 10 Eaton Street, whatever you say."

The old gentleman glanced up quickly as if struck by some sudden idea.

"Mrs. Sim!" he called; then, as the elderly maid appeared in answer to his summons, "Take these two children into the dining-room and give them some tea. And listen, here," he continued, in an audible whisper, "mind you don't let them run away; keep them in your sight till I find out where to send them."

So, much against their wills, but too tired and frightened to protest, the two children allowed themselves to be led into the dining-room. It was an ugly, dingy room, but a bright fire was burning in the grate, before which Ruffie promptly threw himself down, while Mrs. Sim brought forward two chairs, upon which she ordered her charges to seat themselves. Then telling them to be good children, and not to move while she fetched them some tea, she left the room, closing the door carefully behind her.

No sooner had the sound of her footsteps died away than the Princess ran to Alister's side, clinging closely to him for protection.

"Alister," she whispered, "did you hear what the old gentleman said about sending to the perlice? What do you think he meant?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," replied the little boy dismally, "but he spoke as if we were ever such naughty children. I do wish I could hear what he is saying to that man outside in the passage; then we should know what he means to do with us. Perhaps if I open the door a tiny chink I might listen."

So, getting off his chair, he stole across the floor on tip-toe, and grasping the door handle, turned it as noiselessly as he could. But it did not open; so he tried it the other way. Still it did not open; and growing reckless, he turned it first one way then the other, shaking the door in his eagerness. Then he turned to his companion with a terrified face.

"She has locked us in!" he gasped.

"Oh, I know what it is," whispered the Princess, in a despairing voice. "They have locked us in here, and they've sent for them perlicemen to come and take us to prison."

Oh, why doesn't somebody come and rescue us!"

"I'll try and think of some way to escape; only you mustn't begin to cry again. And I hear that cross woman coming back, so come back to our chairs, quick!" cried Alister.

And they had scarcely time to scramble back to their seats before the door opened and Mrs. Sim came in, carrying a tray with tea things, which she set down on the table, bidding them draw their chairs up and take what they wanted to eat.

What a strange meal that was! The two children were too much upset by the strangeness of their surroundings and the terrifying discovery of the locked door to do more than pretend to eat, while Mrs. Sim did not help to reassure them by gazing at them in grim silence. She did not care for children at any time, and as at that moment she had a friend waiting downstairs to have tea with her, she was only anxious to get rid of these two tiresome little intruders as soon as possible.

Ruffie, in fact, was the only one of the

party who was enjoying himself as he ate up all the scraps of bread and butter which his little mistress managed to convey to him unobserved.

No sooner was tea over than Mrs. Sim rose, and picking up the tray, carried it off, telling the children she would be back soon. And this time they distinctly heard the key turn in the lock.

For a few minutes they remained silent, gazing at the door in hopeless despair. Then the Princess began to cry quietly.

"I'm sure that they will be coming d'rectly to take us to prison," she whispered. "Oh! I do wish I hadn't been naughty and runned away."

"I've been thinking," said Alister, "that if they keep the door locked, we must try and get out by the window. I believe I could open it if I stand on that chair close by, only I wonder if it will make a dreadful noise."

The Princess dried her eyes and clapped her hands softly.

"What a good idea!" she cried. "Of course

people in stories are always rescued through windows when doors is locked. I'll hold the chair steady while you try the window."

So Alister climbed up, and found that he could unfasten the latch without any difficulty. Then he began to push the sash up very slowly and carefully, pausing in nervous terror every time it creaked, until at last he had succeeded in opening it enough to allow him to lean right out of the window. Then he drew back with an exclamation of dismay.

"There's the area underneath," he said—"I'd quite forgotten it; and we should have to clamber on to the little wall beside the steps up to the front door. I could do it all right, but I don't believe you would ever manage it."

"I can climb trees ever so well, and I believe I can scramble out of this window," answered the Princess; "only you must go first, and stand on the little wall and hold out both your hands to me. And Ruffie will have to follow by himself; I s'pect he can jump that. Come along, Ruffie."

Ruffie, who was fast asleep before the fire,

stretched himself lazily, and came forward unwillingly, eyeing the open window with much disfavour.

"Be quick!" whispered the little girl; "I hear some one walking about in the passage."

Alister wriggled himself hastily out through the open window, and managed to swing himself on to the wall without much difficulty. But when it came to the Princess's turn to follow, she found that it was not quite so easy as she expected. For one thing, her legs were so much shorter, and her frilled petticoats kept catching in the window. At last, however, after several attempts, she managed to reach the wall; but slipping just as she did so, she fell headlong forwards on to the stone steps, cutting her knees and bruising herself badly.

But there was no time for tears, for at any moment some one might open the dining-room door, and, finding the room deserted and the window open, run out to look for them. So, gulping down her sobs, she called softly to Ruffie to follow them.

Poor Ruffie, however, did not at all like the look of the leap which he was expected to make, and, standing on the chair, his fore-paws on the window-sill, he gazed out at them, whining piteously, but quite refusing to jump.

"What shall we do?" cried Alister, in despair. "I'm certain I hear somebody coming. Let's run down the street a little way, and then he is sure to follow."

So, very unwillingly, the Princess allowed herself to be dragged away; but before they had gone far they were stopped by the sound of a piteous howl. There was Ruffie still at the window, and crying to get after them.

"I must run back; I can't leave him!" exclaimed the little girl.

But Alister caught hold of her.

"If he howls like that," he said, "he will bring that cross woman in a moment; and you know they don't put dogs in prison, so very likely they'll let him go, and if we hide somewhere near we can watch for him and call when we see him. There is a house

over there that looks quite empty, and we could hide down the area steps."

And drawing the Princess into the shadow of the empty house, he hurried her down the steps, till they found a corner where they could watch the street without being seen themselves. It was raining hard now, and they shivered with cold as they waited.

Before long they could see some one come to the window behind Ruffie, lift him away, and close it. Then the front door opened and two figures came out and looked up and down the street; but just as they seemed to be debating what to do next, a cab drove quickly up, and a man sprang out. Then there was more talking, and suddenly the door opened again, and out rushed Ruffie. For a few moments he sniffed about, whining softly; then having apparently found what he wanted, he gave a clear, joyous bark, and set off down the street towards the children's hiding-place at full speed. Close behind him came the man whom they had seen drive up to the house, and whose cab was still following as he hurried along.

Down the area steps dashed Ruffie, and flung himself into his little mistress's arms, wild with excitement and delight.

"Alister," called a voice at the same moment, "are you down there?"

Alister gave a cry of relief.

"O Uncle Gerald! how glad I am you have come," he exclaimed, as he ran to meet him.

"Is the little girl there?" inquired his uncle. "You get into the cab while I fetch her."

But hearing his words, the Princess, with Ruffie clasped tightly in her arms, was already up the steps.

"I am so glad you've come to rescue us, Alister's uncle, for we are so tired and hungry and cold," she cried, as she allowed herself to be lifted and carried to the cab, where she and Ruffie both insisted upon sitting on their new friend's knees, while Alister shrank into a corner, wishing that he dared to take such liberties with his uncle.

"I don't want to hear your whole story now; that must wait till you are rested and

have dry clothes on," said Uncle Gerald, as they drove along. "But what I do want to know is why, when you were safe in that house, you were silly enough to run away again. I might not have found you for hours, if it had not been for the little dog."

"We heard them say that they would send for the police," faltered Alister.

"Well, the best thing they could do. The police were looking for you, and would have brought you safe home. As it was, that ragged friend of yours came to try if he could find me at Eaton Street, Belgravia, instead of Eaton Street, Bayswater, which was where he left you. I suppose it never occurred to you that there might be two streets of the same name."

"I hope you gave the poor man some pennies," murmured the Princess sleepily; and being reassured on this point, her golden head sank on to Uncle Gerald's shoulder, and when they drew up at the door of her cousin's house she never woke till he had carried her inside and left her with her friends.

"You had better go to bed at once,

Alistar," said his uncle sternly, as they entered his house. "To-morrow I shall have to punish you for your naughtiness and disobedience. If that poor little girl opposite is ill after this, you will be to blame for persuading her to run away."

"But she wanted—" began Alistar, but his uncle cut him short.

"Don't make things worse by trying to make out that it was the fault of a baby like that," he said. "Besides which I know all about your going to tea there yesterday, and concealing it. The little girl told her nurse about it, and as soon as she was missed they sent over here to see if she was with you. I am disappointed to find how deceitful you have been."

And too weary and miserable to defend himself, Alistar crept up to bed.





CHAPTER VI.

THE PRINCESS TRIUMPHS.

THE next day, however, Alister was ill—much too ill for any one to think of scolding him. His limbs ached, and his head felt heavy and stupid; and when the doctor was called in, he pronounced that the little boy had caught a severe chill, and must be kept warm in bed, and made to drink doses of an uninviting-looking mixture in a bottle, labelled “To be taken every two hours.”

Alister wondered how the Princess was feeling this morning, and hoped that, as she had worn his coat all the time, she had not

taken such a bad cold as himself. He longed to know whether she and Ruffie had gone out for their usual walk ; but nurse looked still too angry with him, after the fright he had given her, for him to venture to inquire from her. And when Uncle Gerald came up to pay him a short visit, he looked so stern and worried that his nephew was afraid to speak to him.

However, the longest day must pass some time, and this one was over at last. When Alister awoke the next morning from a good, long sleep, things did not seem quite so hopeless.

And that day, just as Uncle Gerald was preparing to go up to visit the little invalid, word was brought to him that a lady, who wished most particularly to see him, was waiting in the drawing-room. A good deal surprised, he ran upstairs and opened the door, when the first thing he saw was the Princess, and with her a lady with the same fluffy, golden hair and sparkling blue eyes.

"I hope you will forgive me for troubling you," she said, as he entered, "but my little girl has been so unhappy since we heard that your nephew is ill. She is afraid that you

will blame him too much for their escapade the day before yesterday, and so I thought that she had better come and explain herself how much she was in fault."

"It is very kind of you to come," replied Uncle Gerald, rather bewildered; "but I am afraid there is no excuse for a boy of Alister's age leading a child, almost a baby, as your little girl is, into mischief."

But here the Princess, her face very red and her eyes full of tears, stepped forward resolutely.

"I aren't a baby," she announced; "and it was me planned it all about running away, and Alister coming to tea, and everything."

Then she began at the beginning, and told the story of their acquaintance from the day of their meeting at the children's party.

"And please, Alister's uncle, you won't be angry with him any more, will you?" she added, in conclusion; "for, you see, it was most my fault; and then, you know, he did tell you about the tea, though he was dreadfully frightened of you."

"But he did *not* tell me, and that was

really what I was most angry about; it seemed so deceitful," replied Uncle Gerald.

"I'm sure he did though," persisted the little girl; "'cos he said last thing he should tell you at once and get it over. P'raps you weren't listening to what he said."

Uncle Gerald's face cleared.

"Now I remember," he exclaimed. "I was out to dinner that night, so he did not see me. But I am glad to think that he meant to tell me; and I think that, after all, perhaps, he has been enough punished by being so ill, so I suppose I must promise to say no more about it."

"Thank you *very* much," said the Princess, gratefully. "I likes you very much, and I aren't a bit frightened of you; but Alister is."

"I don't want him to be. Don't you think you could tell me what to do not to be quite such an ogre to my nephew?"

"I s'pect I could. I'll think about it, and tell you anything I can, 'cos you've been nice and not cross," replied the little girl.

"And I hope that you will let me come and see Alister to-morrow," said her mother,

as she rose to go. "I used to know his father quite well—I recognized the name as soon as I heard it—so I hope that I may be allowed to come and help to amuse the poor little fellow while he is ill."

"And be sure you say that the Princess's mother is coming to see him. You mustn't say our real big name, or it will quite spoil all the nice mystery," broke in the Princess; "and please tell him that I was a silly, naughty little girl to think that my mother could forget me. She had only not written 'cos she was coming home as a surprise; and when I got back I found her there, and dreadfully frightened. But I aren't never going to be so silly, and not trust her again, so be sure you tell him."

After promising to deliver this message, Uncle Gerald said good-bye, and went upstairs to tell Alister about his visitors.

How delighted the little boy was too! Uncle Gerald was so kind, and not angry any more; and the prospect of actually having a visit from the Princess's mother seemed too good to be true—the only draw-

back to his happiness being that he was afraid that, now his little friend had got her father and mother home again, she would soon be leaving the house opposite.

Next day the Princess's mother arrived, accompanied by her little girl and Ruffie; and after having a talk with Uncle Gerald, she went upstairs to visit the invalid, leaving her escort to go on for a walk with nurse.

But the Princess objected to this arrangement.

"If I mayn't go upstairs with her, I would rather stay and talk to you; so would Ruffie. May we, Alister's uncle?"

"Of course you may," answered Uncle Gerald, much flattered. "Come to my room, and we will see if the cook has any cakes which would suit you and Master Ruffie."

The little girl seated herself with an air of demure propriety.

"I've been thinking ever so," she said; "and I'm quite sure that if my lovely plan comes true, and Alister goes to the country—like the doctor says he must—he will feel dreadful dull when he gets back here, 'cos, you see, he won't even have me and Ruffie to

watch. Now I don't expect you knows one bit how to make him feel pleased and 'cited."

"No, I'm sure I don't; but perhaps you can advise me."

"I don't know what ervise means, but I have made up a lovely plan for you. While he is away you must have the nursery done with a paper covered with birds and flowers, as like mine as you can get it, 'cos he loved that; and be sure the birds is blue and red."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Uncle Gerald, "I had no idea a wall paper could make so much difference in a person's—even a child's—happiness."

"Course it can. He will feel quite like being in the country when he looks at it. My birds have all got names; and Cousin Mary says it isn't very 'spensive."

And Uncle Gerald, much amused, promised that he would see to it at once, on condition that she and Ruffie would pay him a visit as soon as it was done.

Meanwhile upstairs mother was seated by Alister's bed. He lay gazing at her with admiring eyes.

"You're just like a grown-up princess," he said; "and you don't look a bit old, like most people's mothers."

His visitor laughed gaily.

"Perhaps princesses don't grow old like other people," she said. "And now I am going to take advantage of my position as one to give you some orders. You know that the doctor says you must go away for a good change of air?"

"Yes; but I'd much rather stay here, where I can see both you and the Princess."

"But you would not see us, because we are going to our home in the country at once. Now don't be a silly boy and look so inclined to cry. When I come to pay a visit, it is to make people cheerful; and my orders are these—that you are to get well as quickly as possible, and come down to stay with the Princess for a real, long visit. Now what do you think of our plan?"

"Oh! it is too beautiful!" cried Alister. "But Uncle Gerald will never let me go," he added dejectedly.

"Yes, he will. Of course, I consulted him

first; and now that he has given his consent, I am going to write to your father and tell him we have stolen his little boy for a time; for I know your father quite well—in fact, he was a great friend of my husband's, although we have not seen him for some years. So now all that you have got to do is to get well enough to travel as quickly as possible."

"And I may ride the black pony, and play with the Princess and Ruffie all day long, and see all those flowers that she told me about?" cried the little boy, his eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Well, yes; I think that I may safely promise to let you do all those things," replied his visitor. "And if you do enjoy yourself, I want you to promise me in return to try to remember that it is your uncle who has allowed you to come; because, if you once understand that he wants you to be happy and to enjoy yourself, perhaps another time when you are tempted to do anything so naughty and foolish as to run away as you did without consulting any one, you will learn to trust him enough to know that if

you ask him about anything you very much want—if it is a good and sensible wish, of course, I mean—he will try to grant it. Do you understand what I mean, my dear?”

“Yes, quite,” replied Alister; “and I will promise to remember that it’s Uncle Gerald is letting me go, and I won’t be frightened of him again, if I can help it. And, oh! thank you very much, dear Princess’s mother; it all seems too good to be really true.”

Then his visitor rose, and after bidding good-bye to the little boy, left him alone to lie and dream of all the delights which were in store for him during this wonderful visit.

When Uncle Gerald came upstairs to see him, he began to try to keep his promise, by saying how sorry he was for his disobedience, and how very delighted at the prospect of going to the country; and his uncle was so kind and sympathetic that he forgot his shyness, and was soon chattering away about the Princess and her mother, not to mention the black pony, Ruffie, and the flowers.

And it all came true, just as Alister had planned it, only much, much nicer. That is

the best of childhood—its plans do sometimes come true, and are not like those of grown-up people, generally disappointing in their fulfilment; perhaps because they are often just “good and sensible wishes,” as the Princess’s mother said.

But of all that delightful time I cannot tell you now—that would take a book all to itself; how he rode the black pony—and fell off, too, sometimes—ran races with Ruffie, and played with the Princess through the long spring days.

Only children are supposed to be spoilt, but as long as they do not grow selfish, I never can see that that matters much. And the Princess was not selfish; for she had been taught that if you are very happy yourself, the best thing in the world is to try to make other people happy too. If any “only children” read this story, I hope they will remember that this is the great secret of a happy life, and that it is not in the least necessary for a spoilt child to be a selfish one.

So the Princess shared her toys and pets—even the affections of her beloved Ruffie—

with her little visitor, who in return thought there was nobody in the world could compare with her, which is quite the light in which a subject should look upon his liege lady.

That visit, too, was only the first of many happy ones; and later on, when father came home from India, Alister had the delight of receiving the Princess and Ruffie in his own home in the Highlands.

And though he is quite a big boy now—so big, in fact, that he has been at school for a whole year—still no little dog is half so beautiful in his eyes as dear, little, bright-eyed, fluffy-haired Ruffie, who, by-the-bye, is more like a tiny miniature St. Bernard than anything else. Nor do I think that any little girl will ever take the place in his affections which is held by the Princess who lived opposite.

THE END.



